

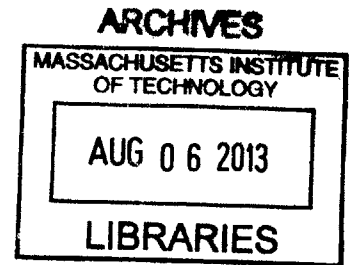
Rights for the Voiceless:
The State, Civil Society and Primary Education in Rural India

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ABSTRACT

When and how do public institutions work effectively on behalf of marginalized citizens? The Indian government has enacted a number of policies for universal primary education, and yet the extent and quality of implementation varies significantly across regions. Why, operating under the same national policy framework, democratic institutions and administrative structures, do some public agencies in India implement policies more effectively than others? This dissertation identifies the mechanisms behind policy implementation through a series of sub-national comparisons and nested case studies carried out in three north Indian states—Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. While much scholarship emphasizes the design of formal institutions, my study highlights the importance of informal bureaucratic norms, unwritten yet widely observed rules within the state that guide how public officials behave and relate to citizens. The study finds that agencies governed by *deliberative* norms—these are norms that encourage bureaucrats to work collectively to solve problems, bend official rules and promote civic participation—implement policies more effectively than agencies that operate in a *legalistic* fashion, adhering strictly to formal rules and procedures while discouraging citizen engagement. These findings are drawn from more than two years of field research, including over 500 interviews and focus group discussions, participant observation within public agencies and primary schools, and village-level ethnography. The study of policy implementation in India sheds critical light on how public institutions function in practice and relate to citizens on the ground, and offers new theoretical insights on the relationship between governance and well-being in developing democracies.

Thesis Supervisor: Richard M. Locke

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Chapter 1. Introduction: Bureaucratic Norms and Policy Implementation

The central problem of planning is increasingly that of implementation, and the problems of implementation are essentially those of politics, social organization and cultural values...The result is often a great hiatus between law and reality, between what is willed by the national leadership and what is done at the local level, between the high ideals in New Delhi and the cynicism in the mofussil towns.¹

1.1. Introduction

To provide every child with an education is considered a fundamental duty of the modern state. Governments across the world have enacted laws making primary education universal, free and compulsory. Many declare it a basic right. Yet the relative ease with which rights can be declared belies the immense challenge states face in securing them. Notwithstanding major governmental efforts for universal primary education in developing countries, 70 million school-age children remain out of school. A far greater number fail to complete a full course of primary schooling. At the same time, states vary considerably in their ability to implement universal primary education, and there are striking examples of progress, even in the most unlikely settings. South Asia, home to some of the most egregious educational inequalities in the world, saw the disparity in primary school completion between girls and boys fall to 3.2 percent by 2009, a remarkable four-fold decline within a decade.² Yet significant variation exists across the region and within countries as well, compelling one to ask: Why do public agencies in some places work more effectively than others on behalf of marginalized citizens? More specifically, when and how do public agencies implement universal primary education effectively? This dissertation aims to address these questions in the context of rural India.

For a developing country like India, with a legacy of entrenched social inequality, education is considered the great equalizer. It is a means for the marginalized to participate in a modern economy and achieve social mobility. At the same time, India's large, multiethnic, federal democracy displays significant subnational variation in the implementation of primary education policy, and thus offers a valuable setting to examine the above questions. Operating under the same national policy framework, democratic institutions and administrative structures, why do some public agencies in India implement universal primary education policies more effectively than others? In answering that question, this dissertation helps advance our understanding of the conditions under which public institutions function effectively, and offers new theoretical insights on the relationship between governance and well-being in developing countries.

A variety of explanations exist for why implementation outcomes for primary education policy should vary. A first line of reasoning emphasizes the role of economic factors, such as levels of income and economic growth. Yet these are insufficient for explaining variation within India. A number of Indian states have made substantial gains in primary education at relatively low levels of

¹ Excerpt from Myron Weiner (1962), *The Politics of Scarcity: Public Pressure and Political Response in India*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

² "World Bank Support for Education: Learning for All, Skills for Jobs," April 2012, The World Bank: <http://go.worldbank.org/AFKZ7L50L0>.

income, and some outperform much wealthier states.³ A second set of theories maintains that democracies generate better outcomes for education and health by making public agencies formally accountable to citizens.⁴ Such explanations are limited by the fact that Indian states are subject to a common federal system of democratic institutions and rates of political participation are comparatively high throughout the country. In fact, political participation is higher among India's disadvantaged rural voters in comparison to their more privileged, urban counterparts (Yadav 2002). According to a third line of reasoning, it is not democracy per se, but who governs that matters most, and left-leaning parties are more likely to ensure that policies for the poor get implemented.⁵ Yet even those arguments face a difficult time accounting for subnational variation in India. Most Indian states have not been subject to leftist government, and several of them are among the top performers in primary education. Meanwhile, the two states that do possess a communist political legacy (West Bengal and Kerala) are on virtually opposite ends of the spectrum, all of which suggests that left-leaning government is insufficient at best.

This dissertation advances an alternative account for when and how public agencies implement universal primary education effectively. To understand policy implementation, I argue, we need to look beyond the arena of elections and formal institutions to examine the *informal* institutions that govern how public agencies function in practice and relate to citizens on the ground. I advance a theory centered on bureaucratic norms, unwritten yet widely observed rules within the state that shape the behavior of public officials and structure their relations with civic actors outside the state. Bureaucratic norms guide public officials on how to enact their roles and responsibilities in carrying out the tasks associated with policy implementation—from infrastructure development to community outreach. They also shape how public officials relate to citizens and civic agencies outside the state in critical areas of monitoring and service delivery. Through the mechanisms of bureaucratic behavior and civic action, the norms governing public agencies generate outcomes for policy implementation.

I employ a combination of field research methods at the state- and local-level, including 500 in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, participant observation within public agencies and schools, and village ethnography, to show that public agencies governed by different sets of norms generate varying outcomes for the implementation of primary education across Indian states. Through a series of subnational comparisons and nested case studies conducted in rural north India, I identify the mechanisms by which bureaucratic norms produce variation in implementation outcomes. As many have pointed out, the delivery of public services in India involves a combination of both “public action” by officials within the state and “societal action” from below by citizens and civic groups (Heller 1999; Drèze and Sen 2002; Banerjee, Iyer et al. 2007). This dissertation offers one of the first systematic, field-based investigations of the causal mechanisms underlying that interaction.

³ India's abysmal human development record overall, along with major advancements in some of its less wealthy states and regions, has led many scholars to question the connection between economic development, governance and the quality of life experienced the poor. See, for example: Drèze and Sen (2002), Banerjee, Iyer and Somanathan (2007) and Kohli (2012).

⁴ On the relationship between democracy and the provision of healthcare and educational services, see Brown and Hunter (1999), Przeworski et al. (2000) and Lake and Baum (2001).

⁵ On the connection between left-leaning parties and improved social development outcomes for the poor, see for example: Korpi (1983) and Shalev (1983). For an argument along those lines within the Indian context, see Kohli (1987).

Building on theories of governance and organization, I develop two ideal types of bureaucratic norms: deliberative and legalistic. When public agencies are governed by *deliberative* norms, bureaucrats tend to communicate and work collectively across organizational divisions within the state. They bend official rules to suit varying local contexts and redefine policies in response to conditions on the ground, for example, by targeting marginalized communities with special teachers and schools. Deliberative norms encourage bureaucrats to seek input from civic agencies and citizens, who can provide local knowledge and resources critical for planning and monitoring. These interactions help raise societal expectations around the benefits of participation, encouraging further collective action around primary schooling. Through bureaucratic behavior and civic engagement, the implementation is responsive to local needs and conditions, leading to well-functioning schools. In that way, agencies governed by deliberative norms implement universal primary education effectively.

By contrast, legalism takes rule-following as its principal concern. In public agencies governed by *legalistic* norms, bureaucrats tend to work within their official roles and adhere closely to organizational hierarchies. They tend to apply policies and procedures uniformly across cases, seeking to avoid particularism. Legalistic norms steer bureaucrats towards meeting official mandates and targets, often to the neglect of varying local needs. They will tend, for instance, to develop new schools based on official standards and override local demands. Bureaucrats subject to legalistic norms tend to discount the input of citizens and limit the involvement of civic agencies. By keeping societal actors at bay, bureaucrats show a commitment to upholding the administrative order and protecting the internal affairs of the state from interference and capture. In so doing, however, they undermine collective action directed at the state. Marginalized citizens see little benefit to joining hands with public agencies, and they are less likely to devote time and resources to collectively monitor government schools. Public agencies bound by legalistic norms can be effective in areas such as infrastructure development, which carry well-specified targets and demand comparatively little citizen input. However, when it comes to service delivery and ensuring that schools function, they tend to falter. In that way, legalism leads to primary schooling expansion of poor quality.

In analyzing how the norms that govern public institutions shape behavior, this dissertation helps integrate and advance new theoretical insights across several, long-standing bodies of scholarship. Philosophers have long contemplated the connection between deliberation and the quality of government. Contemporary political theorists such as Cohen (1989; 1997) and Habermas (1998) emphasize how deliberation can shape the interests and expectations of citizens, strengthen the legitimacy of public institutions, and help inculcate a sense of the common good. Scholars of governance have applied these ideas across a number of policy areas, from public service delivery to poverty alleviation, analyzing how deliberative processes operate, foster citizen participation and shape the quality of implementation (Ostrom 1996; Fung and Wright 2003). Yet their analytical gaze has fallen primarily on the formal design of deliberative institutions and programs.

Social theorists and scholars of organization, meanwhile, have stressed the importance of norms, the *informal* rules of the game that shape the expectations and behavior of social actors (Elster 1989; Wilson 1989). Bureaucratic norms—the unwritten rules that guide public officials—can profoundly affect the ability of states to secure the collective well-being of citizens. They can, as Tendler (1997) observes in the Brazilian province of Ceará, motivate frontline health workers to cooperate with local communities to improve service delivery in otherwise unlikely settings. They can also compel bureaucrats to dominate local communities, and override the knowledge and needs of marginalized groups, producing the manifold developmental disasters that Scott (1998) describes.

Building on these insights, this study unpacks the black-box of public institutions, and shows how norms that guide behavior and internal processes within public agencies also structure their relations with citizens and agencies outside the state. In so doing, it helps advance new insights for the study of informal institutions and governance in developing democracies (Helmke and Levitsky 2004).⁶

The rest of this introductory chapter sets out the theory and analytical roadmap of the dissertation. In Section 2, I define policy implementation and discuss the comprehensive indicators used in the study for measuring implementation of universal primary education policy in India. The research design and methodology of the study are presented in Section 3. There I explore the broad patterns of subnational variation in outcomes across India and discuss the advantages of a multi-level research design. I then go on to develop a theory of bureaucratic norms and policy implementation in Section 4. I consider some alternative approaches to the study of bureaucracy and discuss their limitations for explaining variation in the performance of public agencies in India. I then present my theory of bureaucratic norms, which draws on a vast literature in political theory and organizational behavior. I end the section with a discussion of how bureaucratic norms relate to democratic governance in India. Finally, Section 5 concludes the chapter with an overview of the remaining sections of the dissertation.

1.2. Defining Policy Implementation

Studies of governance take policy implementation as a critical component for evaluating the effectiveness and accountability of public institutions (Putnam, Leonardi et al. 1994). Yet few provide an explicit definition of the concept. Policy implementation involves the range of activities carried out by public and private agencies for achieving the objectives of a policy (Van Meter and Van Horn 1975: 447-448). In the case of universal primary education, it involves the array of tasks required to ensure that every child is in school and learning. These tasks include not only the provision of school buildings and physical infrastructure, but the delivery of services and local monitoring to ensure the *quality* of primary schooling.

I conceptualize policy implementation in terms of three broad sets of tasks. These include: (1) planning and provision, (2) educational service delivery and (3) system monitoring and feedback. The first set of tasks relates to the quantitative aspects of universal primary education, which involves the expansion of physical infrastructure and provision of school facilities. The second two sets of activities are more directly tied to the quality of educational services provided. Educational service delivery includes the placement and training of teachers, the provision of learning materials, and other forms of academic support. System monitoring and feedback incorporates the activities necessary to ensure that schools are functioning, that gaps are identified and corrected. Since public officials cannot possibly monitor every school, particularly in far-flung villages, a critical aspect of monitoring and feedback involves community participation and collective vigilance.

⁶ As these scholars note, the study of bureaucratic norms occupies a place within the larger theoretical enterprise of informal institutions: “[s]ocially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside officially sanctioned channels” (Helmke and Levitsky 2006: 5).

In selecting outcome indicators for policy implementation, I draw on much existing literature in social development. In their seminal contributions to the field, Drèze and Sen (2002) investigate a wide range of outcomes to assess the implementation of universal primary education in India. Building on their work and the growing body of research on education in development economics, I employ a comprehensive set of indicators to capture implementation. Tables 1.1.1-1.1.6 in the chapter Appendix showcase some of the variation in outcomes across the three major Indian states covered in this study. First, I examine indicators related to access to schooling. These include measures for the provision of school infrastructure and facilities prescribed under India's Right to Education Act and provided under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the central government's flagship primary education program. I supplement school infrastructure indicators with rates of school enrollment and attendance.

Second, to capture how well schools are functioning, I use indicators related to teaching and learning, the availability of academic support materials (e.g. library books) and the provision of school lunch programs. For teaching, I use indicators such as the percentage of schools managed by a single teacher, rates of teacher absence, and the presence of library and teaching materials. School teacher absence is a major impediment to the delivery of education in primary school systems across the developing world, and has received much scholar attention as of late (Banerjee and Duflo 2006). Ensuring that schools are adequately staffed, that teachers show up each day, and have teaching materials available are all essential to the delivery of educational services. I also examine outcomes associated with India's Midday Meal Program, a national policy to provide free lunches each day in primary and middle schools. Finally, I include student dropout rates as a final check on school quality. For any policy, one can ask whether target populations are making use of governmental services, and the rate of dropout serves as a proxy for the quality of the experience students have within the primary school system. In sum, the broad range of indicators allows for a rich, nuanced picture of the variation in policy implementation across Indian states.

The data for implementation outcomes analyzed in this study comes from multiple sources. These include the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), one of India's most comprehensive and reliable household surveys. I also examine data from multiple years of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER). The report is published each year by Pratham, one of India's leading nongovernmental organizations working in primary education for the poor. The data are collected in a national, large-N survey of approximately thirty villages and government primary schools per district, covering all rural districts of India. In addition, I use data from a major World Bank study on teacher absence conducted by Kremer et al (2005). Finally, I supplement these independent sources with governmental data from the Census of India, along with departmental data and official reports from India's Department of Elementary Education, Ministry of Human Resources and Development. Although official data carries problems of reliability (e.g. the artificial inflation of enrollment rates) and thus should be interpreted with caution, they offer an additional source of evidence for exploring subnational variation in policy implementation outcomes.

The decision to conceptualize institutional effectiveness in terms of these outcomes is driven not only by theoretical concerns but the realities facing India's primary education system. With approximately 54 percent of the country's 1.2 billion people under the age of 25, India is home to one of the world's youngest populations. The much-vaunted fact of India's "demographic dividend"—a large and growing proportion of working-age people—hinges crucially on the young generation's ability to obtain a quality education. The optimism and high economic aspirations one reads about in the foreign press rest in stark contrast to the appalling conditions of basic public

services across the country, particularly in early child education and health. According to India's Minister of Human Resource Development, Kapil Sibal, "It will be a dividend if we empower our young. It will be a disaster if we fail to put in place a policy and framework where they can be empowered."⁷ With the country's recent achievement of nearly universal enrollment—the primary school enrollment rate currently stands at 96 percent—the poor quality of education and fast-growing privatization are subjects of fervent public discussion and debate. As Professor Krishna Kumar, one of India's leading educationists, writes in an editorial for a major daily, "Why India can't do better in education is a question many people who praise our economic growth rate frequently ask."⁸ The indicators used for this study capture the realities of the country's notable and yet highly uneven progress towards achieving universal primary education, a public issue of pressing concern to Indian citizens.

1.3. Research Design and Methodology

This study aims to understand when and how public agencies are effective in implementing universal primary education policies in rural India. In particular, it seeks to identify the mechanisms underlying effective policy implementation. For a number of reasons, India presents an ideal setting to carry out such a study. Notwithstanding more than sixty years of nearly uninterrupted democracy, several decades of robust economic growth, and a significant expansion in policies and services for the poor, India's record in human development is nothing short of abysmal. In the area of basic literacy, India lags substantially behind other BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) countries, the group of emerging economies with which it is often compared (Kingdon 2007). In terms of early child education and health, India's performance is among the worst in the developing world, even in comparison to poorer countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Drèze and Sen 2002). India's woeful human development record raises the sobering question of why democratic institutions and economic growth have failed so remarkably to improve the quality of life for so many people.

At the same time, however, India has made substantial progress in expanding primary education. Over the last two decades, the growth of new policies and budgetary commitments by the central government has been substantial, and India has experienced a surge in primary school infrastructure and enrollment over the last two decades. With policies like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the country's flagship "Education for All" program, the Midday Meal scheme, and most recently, the Right to Education Act, India's central government has actively set a national policy framework for Indian states (or provinces) to implement. Yet the extent and quality of implementation varies substantially, which makes a study like this even more compelling. Public agencies in some Indian states have made remarkably progress, while others continue to lag behind. Moreover, the variation across Indian states is not well-explained by levels of economic development and income growth, helping to clear the way for political analysis. As Figures 1.2.1-1.2.2 in the chapter Appendix show, taking the basic literacy rate as a proxy indicator for the reach of primary schooling, India has seen steady improvement, and yet subnational variation remains significant.

⁷ "Amid population boom, India hopes for 'demographic dividend' but fears disaster," *The Washington Post*, October 15, 2011.

⁸ Krishna Kumar, "Ensuring Education for All", *The Hindu*, Thursday, July 27, 2006, <http://www.hindu.com/2006/07/27/stories/2006072705541000.htm>.

To identify the mechanisms by which public agencies implement universal primary education effectively, this study advances a subnational comparative research design. Subnational comparative research has the advantage of allowing one to control for a whole host of explanatory factors, which aids in the identification of causal mechanisms (Locke and Thelen 1995; Snyder 2001). The method has been effectively applied in studies examining a wide range of political and economic phenomena in India, and it is particularly well-suited for a study of policy implementation in India.⁹ Indian states (or provinces) face a common set of democratic institutions and formal bureaucratic structures. More recently, Indian states (or provinces) have adopted a common policy framework for primary education, which is financed largely by the central (or federal) government. At the same time, the responsibility for implementing these policies falls on state governments. A subnational comparative approach thus allows us to hold the design of formal institutions and policies constant, and opens the analytical space for a study focused more squarely on the policy implementation *process*.

This study takes subnational comparative analysis one step further by adopting a multi-level research design, one that incorporates analysis at both the state- and local-level. The reasoning behind that approach is twofold. First, a multi-level analysis responds to the realities of governance in India (Kohli 1990). India's federal democracy is organized into three tiers of elected government: the central (or union) government, state (or provincial) government and the local village council (*gram panchayat*). With the organizational breakup and electoral decline of the Congress Party, and concomitant rise of regional parties and coalition governments, India's central government has experienced a steady erosion of authority and greater assertion of power by state governments (Frankel 2005). These changing authority patterns are evident especially in policy areas that impinge on the daily lives of citizens—poverty alleviation, health and education, and law and order.

Pressures to decentralize further have come from the 73rd and 74th Amendments to India's Constitution, which call for the devolution of resources and decision-making power to locally elected village councils, known as the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), India's flagship "Education for All" program, requires all states to adopt a similar administrative structure with state and district teams, along with village-level institutions—the *gram panchayat* and Village Education Committees (VECs). Notwithstanding the formal mandate to decentralize, however, state-level governments in India continue to exert significant authority over policy implementation, primarily through district administration, which remains the principal node of the state overseeing the routine operation of public agencies such as primary schools, public health centers, and the police.

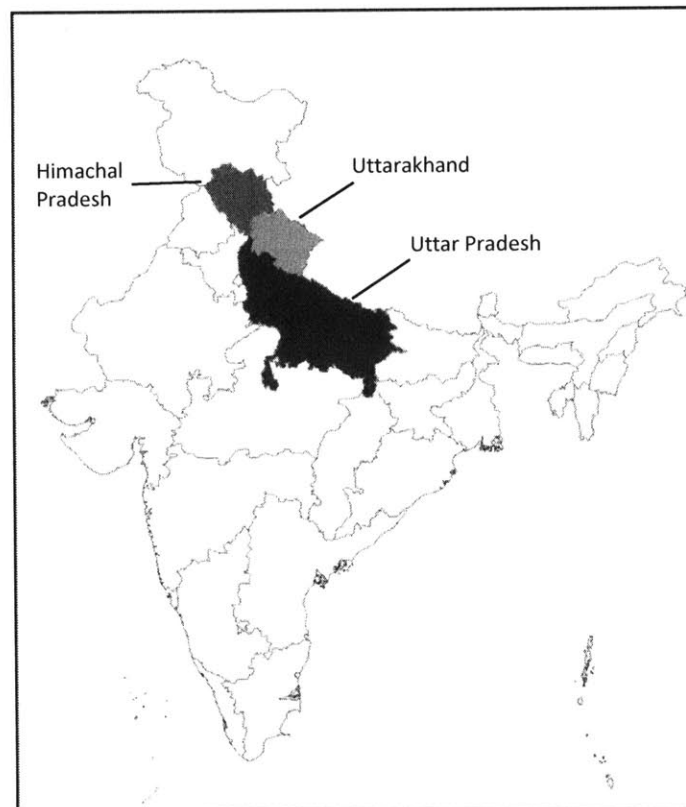
Second, the findings and puzzles thrown up by existing research on governance in India make the case for a multi-level analysis further compelling. Studies by development economists analyzing the provision of public goods and services in India have identified the significance of several local-level factors: village size and levels of development, social heterogeneity based on caste and religion, historical patterns of inequality in land ownership, and the presence of village associations (Betancourt and Gleason 2000; Drèze and Kingdon 2001; Banerjee, Iyer et al. 2007; Banerjee and Somanathan 2007; Pandey 2010). At the same time, however, these same studies find that substantial variation is left unexplained by local district and village characteristics. They report large and significant state-level fixed effects, that is, a common set of mechanisms operating across villages and administrative districts within a particular state, but that vary across states. For all

⁹ The method has been applied effectively within the Indian context to study a wide range of political and economic phenomena. See for example: Varshney (2002); Sinha (2005); Thachil (2009); Ziegfeld (2009); Singh (2010).

the above reasons, implementation outcomes in India, these authors argue, are a product of both “top-down” processes within the state and forms of “bottom-up” pressure and collective action (Banerjee, Iyer et al. 2007; Iyer 2010). A multi-level research design allows one to examine the full chain of governance and probe this two-way causal process.¹⁰

To identify the mechanisms behind implementation, this study incorporates a series of subnational comparisons and nested case studies in three states of rural north India: Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand (see below Figure 1.1.1). The reasons for selecting these three north Indian states go as follows. First, these three states exhibit maximal variation in policy implementation while controlling for a number of cultural, historical and political economy factors. The north Indian Hindi belt is often depicted as uniformly “backward” with regards to education and other facets of social development, especially in comparison to the more socially “progressive” states of south India. Yet substantial variation exists across north India and significant changes have taken place over the last two decades, which has yet to be fully explored. The tables in Appendix A illustrate the wide range in policy implementation outcomes observed across these three states.

Figure 1.1.1 Map of Case Study States in North India



¹⁰ Migdal (2001) articulates convincingly the need for a multi-level, process-oriented approach to analyzing the state. (See esp. “Chapter 4. An Anthropology of the State”).

The hill state of Himachal Pradesh (HP), which at the time of independence was one of India's most illiterate, is now among the leading states in primary education. It has achieved universal access to schooling, service delivery is far superior to other state, and gains have been equally shared by marginalized groups and regions within the state. HP's achievements are all the more remarkable given the unfavorable conditions of the Himalayan region—low population density, highly scattered settlement patterns, harsh climate and geography, and absence of industrial development and urbanization. Notwithstanding these conditions, HP is today widely regarded as one of India's best-performing states in primary education and has achieved the second highest literacy rate in the country. It lags only Kerala, the southern coastal state a widely revered model of social development in India.

Existing studies of governance and social development based on the experiences of south Indian states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu offer many important insights. Yet the sociopolitical conditions in north India are, in many important respects, different. Unlike the south, the Hindi belt region has not experienced major social movements around labor, literacy and caste.¹¹ Social norms, identities and conflicts around gender and caste are also distinct. These social processes are central to the exclusion and integration of marginalized groups, particularly within the education system, and do not translate easily across these regions. Focusing the study on comparisons within north India thus allows for more “contextualized comparison” (Locke and Thelen 1995). While none of this is to deny the utility of the lessons drawn from Kerala and other south Indian states, there is substantial variation to be explored within the context of north India.

The selection of states and administrative districts aims for critical comparison across cases, which aids in the identification and testing of causal mechanisms (Bowen and Petersen 1999). States and districts were selected to control for (or let vary) certain key explanatory factors for policy implementation, including geography, levels of income and poverty, caste composition, party competition and historical legacies of landlordism (*zamindari*). A profile of the states and districts based on these explanatory factors for policy implementation can be found in the chapter Appendix (Figure 1.3.2). Case selection incorporates a matched-pair comparison between Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The comparison holds constant many crucial explanatory factors, producing a “most similar” case analysis that allows us to test the impact of bureaucratic norms (which vary across these two states) on policy implementation outcomes (Lijphart 1971). These two states, located adjacent to each other in the Himalayan region, share very similar geography, culture and political economy characteristics. Yet Himachal Pradesh significantly outperforms Uttarakhand on most indicators of policy implementation, notwithstanding the fact that it began with a much lower literacy base at the time of independence.

In addition, the research design incorporates the least-likely case of Uttar Pradesh (UP), India's largest and most politically significant state. Bordering the two hill states to the southeast lies the plains region of UP. Notwithstanding its venerable bureaucratic legacy, and the recent political mobilization of lower caste groups, UP is among India's worst performing states in primary education. At the same time, it has made significant gains in infrastructure expansion and school

¹¹ Unlike Kerala, the states I examine (1) did not enjoy the spread of education by enlightened rulers or Catholic missionaries, (2) have no history of social movements among lower caste groups and workers, and (3) have no left-leaning political parties, some of the most oft-cited explanations for social development in India (Kohli 1987; Heller 1999; Drèze and Sen 2002).

enrollment, though service delivery remains highly inadequate. Given the significant variation across UP, I analyze policy implementation across two very different administrative districts, which aids further in the identification and testing of causal mechanisms. Finally, the research design exploits the fact that Uttarakhand was carved out of UP in 2000, the same year that the Indian government began implementing its flagship primary education program nationwide. Save for their common administrative history, the two states are different along virtually all other explanatory factors. The recent separation of Uttarakhand from UP thus allows me to test for whether and how bureaucratic norms endure and operate under a new political party system and very different social conditions.

The findings for this study are drawn from more than two years of field research conducted at multiple levels: state, administrative district and village/school (see Figure 1.3.2 in the chapter Appendix). I conducted approximately 500 interviews and focus-group discussions, visited more than 50 primary schools, and conducted 12 village case studies. Fieldwork at the state-level involved interviews with state planners, senior officials in the education bureaucracy, local and international civic agencies, educationists and teachers' union leaders. Interview evidence was further bolstered by participant observation that I conducted of meetings and informal interactions across various subdivisions of the education bureaucracy, including the Department of Education, SSA State Project Office and Midday Meal Program Office.

While the findings from state-level fieldwork offered early evidence for the presence of bureaucratic norms within the state, to determine whether norms operate further down the bureaucratic chain, fieldwork was also conducted in four administrative districts: Shimla (HP), Almora (Uttarakhand), Saharanpur (UP) and Sitapur (UP). The district-level fieldwork combined in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with local officials from the education bureaucracy, local civic agencies, school teachers and parents. In addition, I conducted participant observation with local officials and civic agencies, which covered planning meetings, training sessions and school and community monitoring visits. I also attended meetings and rallies for primary education organized by local civic agencies and community groups.

To determine how local public agencies interact with schools and citizens, intensive fieldwork was conducted in rural primary schools and villages. I conducted in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with school teachers and parents. I supplemented interview evidence with participant observation inside schools, often leading lessons in the classroom and observing directly the interactions between school teachers, students and parents. Lastly, I conducted intensive ethnography inside villages. Villages were selected after accounting for some of the chief explanatory variables identified in the literature on rural governance and primary schooling in India, including village size, caste composition and proximity to motor roads (Drèze and Kingdon 2001). To obtain a granular understanding of village institutions and community dynamics, I stayed in or near case study villages for significant periods of time, on average four weeks per village. I used participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques such as community social mapping, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with residents and village officials (Chambers 1983). I observed the meetings and operations of formal institutions, including gram panchayats and Village Education Committees (VECs), as well as informal associations, particularly village women's groups.

To further ensure the robustness of my findings, I made shorter field visits to primary schools and villages outside the original sample of cases and visited six additional administrative districts. Recognizing the limitations of qualitative field research and the pitfalls of generalizing

outside a small number of cases, these supplemental field visits helped probe and test further the causal mechanisms by which bureaucratic norms influence policy implementation. All in all, I conducted fieldwork in ten rural districts, 20 villages and 50 schools. Fieldwork was supplemented with the systematic collection of documentary evidence. I gathered data and reports from official sources (the Department of Elementary Education), as well as local media and NGO reports on primary education within each district. Taken together, the multiple levels, methods and sources of data collection provide a reliable, fine-grained analysis of policy implementation in rural India.

1.4. Theory and Mechanisms

A large and diverse body of scholarship seeks to explain why some states are more effective than others in implementing universal policies like primary education. Within the Indian context, two influential lines of reasoning may seem particularly compelling. First, some argue that democratic institutions lead to better social policy outcomes by enhancing the state's responsiveness to the needs of citizens (Przeworski, Stokes et al. 1999). In the Indian case, however, the pervasiveness of clientelism seems to render democracy largely procedural, incapable of addressing the substantive needs of poor citizens, especially in the delivery of universal public services like education (Heller 2000; Keefer and Khemani 2004). According to a second body of research, effective government requires more than formal democracy. Where elections alone may not work, civic norms and networks enable citizens to make collective demands on the state (Putnam, Leonardi et al. 1994; Woolcock 1998). Notwithstanding its civic traditions, the low levels of membership in formal associations and deep social divisions that characterize Indian society force one to question the extent to which civil society alone can hold India's public institutions accountable (Chhibber 2001; Chhibber, Shastri et al. 2004).

Without denying the importance of democratic institutions and civic participation, to understand when and how policies for universal primary education get implemented in practice, I argue, we must turn our attention to the bureaucracy, those very agencies in charge of policy implementation. In what follows, I develop a theory centered on bureaucratic norms, unwritten yet widely held rules within public agencies that shape the behavior of officials and structure their relations to citizens on the ground. I begin with a discussion of how the study of bureaucracy can advance our understanding of policy implementation in India, and governance relations more broadly. After considering alternative approaches for analyzing bureaucratic behavior, I argue for the need to examine the *informal* norms and processes by which public agencies operate. I then go on to advance a theory of bureaucratic norms, delineating the mechanisms by which norms influence behavior and generate outcomes for policy implementation. I offer two ideal types of bureaucratic norms, deliberative and legalistic, which produce varying forms of bureaucratic behavior and civic action in the policy implementation process. After presenting the theory, I revisit the literature on democratic institutions and civic engagement, and consider how a theory of bureaucratic norms and policy implementation can complement these alternative approaches for analyzing governance.

4.1. *Bringing the Bureaucracy Back In*

A significant body of scholarship produced under the intellectual rubric of the “developmental state” highlighted the importance of public institutions in charge of governing the market and industrial policy (Johnson 1982; Wade 1990; Woo-Cumings 1999). The developmental state literature was motivated by calls for “bringing the state back in” to the analysis of social and political processes (Evans, Rueschemeyer et al. 1985). Yet studies have shown great conceptual latitude in defining the “state,” which often stands as an all-encompassing moniker for a wide variety of political and social institutions, from political parties, leadership and governing regimes to state-class relations and various bureaucratic agencies. Notwithstanding the significance accorded bureaucracies, comparatively few studies examine them in much empirical detail. Bureaucratic agencies are often depicted in broad brushstrokes and their effectiveness is taken to be a function of autonomy, how well they conform to the ideal of rational-legal authority proposed by Weber (1947).¹² How agencies go about the task of governance, meanwhile, has received comparatively little attention, rendering the bureaucracy an organizational black box.

The need to bring the bureaucracy back in to the study of governance is motivated both by theoretical concerns and the empirical realities facing democratic governments and citizens. Theoretically speaking, our understanding of how democracy works carries implicit assumptions about how public institutions operate. Across many developing democracies, where political arrangements are found to be clientelistic, that is, where they involve the exchange of political support for material rewards, elected officials are thought to target citizens with particularistic benefits. Bureaucracies, who control access to public resources up for exchange, are integral actors in the supply chain of goods and services linking politicians to citizens. At the same time, bureaucracies are not merely vestiges of political exchange. They possess independent organizational qualities and capabilities that bear significantly on the fair and even implementation of laws and policies, especially in political environments that breed particularism (Piattoni 2001; Keefer 2007). Though it is still a budding area of research, some suggest that a well-developed bureaucracy is one of the primary defenses against political corruption and implementation failure in clientelistic political systems (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007).

The study of bureaucracy is further warranted by the empirical realities of governance in India. With the country’s remarkable growth over the last two decades, the dominant image of the stifling and corrupt public official has hardly waned. If anything, the image has gained greater purchase with rising social inequality and growing cases of large-scale corruption, brought on perhaps by the excesses of what some call, “India’s gilded age.”¹³ Yet grand corruption is not the only lens through which public officials are seen. Whether it is applying for a work permit or enrolling children in school, it is through everyday encounters with public agencies that Indian citizens come to “see the state” (Corbridge, Williams et al. 2005). At the same time, the quality of encounters with the state can vary dramatically, often in unpredictable ways. Stylized assumptions about how public agencies function and relate to citizens cannot substitute for close empirical

¹² An important exception is Schneider (1993), who analyzes how the nature career paths influence the policy preferences and relative insulation of bureaucrats from business interests

¹³ Sinha, Jayant and Varshney, Ashutosh, “It is Time for India to Rein in its Robber Barons,” *Financial Times*, January 6, 2011.

inquiry (Harriss-White 2003). Our knowledge of how Indian democracy works hinges, to some degree, on well we understand how Indian bureaucracy works.

Having justified the need to study the bureaucracy, the question we now face is along what theoretical lines ought we to study it? Two approaches tend to dominate the political economy literature on bureaucracy. The first approach, which I mentioned earlier, draws on Weber's classic formulation of bureaucracy as the basis for identifying the organizational features that promote autonomy and corporate coherence of the bureaucracy (Migdal 1988). Bureaucracies that have the ideal systems in place—i.e. civil service protection, meritocratic procedures for recruitment and promotion, a clear division of labor, and rules delineating the lines of authority—are viewed as autonomous organizations, free from the trappings of societal forces and thus capable of commanding “the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”¹⁴ States having such bureaucracies are understood to be developmental. By contrast, “predatory”, “neo-patrimonial”, or “failed” states operate according to personalistic ties and lack collective purpose, which dampens their ability to implement universal policies (Evans 1995; Herring 1999; Kohli 2004).¹⁵

A second body of scholarship, informed by theories of rational choice, understands bureaucratic performance as a question of designing the appropriate incentives. Studies model the control of bureaucratic discretion as a principal-agent problem, wherein political leaders (principals) ensure that policy mandates are carried out by bureaucrats (agents) by providing institutionalized rewards and penalties (McCubbins and Schwartz 1984; Moe 1984; McCubbins, Noll et al. 1987; Banks and Weingast 1992). Public agencies (or political firms) are conceptualized in terms of a hierarchy of contracts linking political principals to bureaucratic agents (Moe 1995).¹⁶ The design of these contractual controls, enforced through systems of monitoring, provide the basis for bureaucratic compliance with policy objectives.

Their differences notwithstanding, both statist and principal-agent approaches arrive at similar conclusions regarding the Indian state. Taking the Weberian rational-legal state as the model for bureaucracy, statist scholarship finds the Indian state comparatively weak (Migdal 1988). In the domain of economic development policy, the bureaucracy is thought to be overrun by elite class interests, personalistic leadership, populist pressures, and, more recently, divisive caste politics (Bardhan 1984; Rudolph and Rudolph 1987; Herring 1999; Kohli 2004). Although the reasons they supply are different, a similar conclusion has been reached by scholars writing from a public choice perspective (Krueger 1990; Bhagwati 1993). India's lackluster growth through much of its post-independence history is understood to have been a product of an interventionist state that promoted rent-seeking behavior among bureaucrats. The very idea of public office, according to these scholars, came to be associated the selling of licenses and regulatory exemptions, not the public good (Krueger 1974).

¹⁴ *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, translated and edited by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 78.

¹⁵ Some even suggest that Indian bureaucracy had the trappings of a Weberian state, but for a variety of reasons, such as the inherent difficulties of centrally managing a large, federal, multi-ethnic state, was unable to realize its developmental promise. As Herring writes: “India must be the most dramatic case of a failed developmental state” (1999: 306).

¹⁶ This approach draws much inspiration from transaction cost economics and contractual theories of the firm (Williamson 1998).

While most of this scholarship focuses on industrial policy, a similar kind of analysis has been carried out concerning India's failed anti-poverty programs and poor record of social development. Kohli (2012) connects the persistent poverty and growing inequality across India to a ruling alliance of business interests within the state, which has led to the adoption pro-business growth policies, while neglecting the delivery of public goods and services for the poor. Those writing from a principal-agent perspective, meanwhile, situate rising inequality and poor social development in the structure of incentives facing politicians and bureaucrats. Public officials gain from providing short-term, particularistic benefits while extracting rents for themselves, rather than delivering quality services for all (Walton 2010).

The developmental state and principal-agent literatures offer important insights, but the extent to which they can explain variation in policy implementation across India is limited. Most informed observers would agree that India's bureaucracy faces severe incentive problems. Systems of performance appraisal within the government rarely if ever take note of implementation outcomes, such as crime rates, levels of student achievement, rates of child immunization, and so on. Systems of promotion within most public agencies are based on seniority within the agency rather than anything having to do with one's achievement. "A striking aspect of India's public institutions," Kapur and Mehta note, "is the paucity of transparent performance criteria by which to gauge their performance." (2005: 13). Yet the (however poor) design of formal incentive systems is practically identical across Indian states, making it difficult to connect these incentive problems to subnational variation in policy implementation outcomes. Moreover, given the absence of appropriate incentives, it is unclear why some public agencies in India perform surprisingly well.¹⁷

The statist approach, meanwhile, ties this variation to broad contours of state-society relations across India. It provides a useful macro-lens for understanding the political economy configurations across India, in particular how political preferences of governing elites are shaped by societal interests and coalitions. Yet these studies offer sparse empirical evidence for the mechanisms by which alternative state-society configurations influence the operation of public agencies in India, and yield subnational variation in outcomes across states. Moreover, their tendency to equate clientelism and political interference—the realities facing most public agencies in India—with state failure or predation is analytically unwarranted. Such classification renders it difficult to analyze when and how bureaucracies do effectively carry out their functions under challenging sociopolitical circumstances.

The need to unpack the bureaucracy is motivated further by the very nature of policy implementation in India's large, federal state system. Significant institutional changes have taken place in India over the last few decades, including the devolution of authority away from the national government and the concentration of power by state governments with the rise of regional parties and subnational politics (Yadav 1999).¹⁸ Meanwhile, serious efforts to decentralize decision-making authority down to the local district- and village-level have also been underway for some

¹⁷ It may still be the case that the overall poor performance of public institutions across India may be tied to the lack of appropriate incentive systems. That said, the principal-agent literature tends to rely on overly stylized assumptions regarding bureaucratic motivation—a universal tendency to shirk responsibility—that makes it difficult to imagine public officials performing their jobs absent formal pressures. Some question the assumption that bureaucratic effort is a product of coercion by principals (Brehm and Gates 1999).

¹⁸ Kapur and Mukhopadhyay (2007) similarly argue that the concentration of authority at the state level is due to regional parties having strong electoral incentives to control resources at the local level. So long as electoral success depends on the ability of politicians to dispense local patronage, however, the same incentives can obtain for national parties as well.

time. While development policies are formulated primarily by state governments, implementation follows a long chain of governance from the state capital down to the administrative district, and ultimately, the village and primary school. Understanding the roles and relations of bureaucrats stationed at different levels of the governance chain is essential to understanding how policy implementation takes place in practice.

4.2 Bureaucratic Norms

The above discussion points to the strengths and limitations of existing approaches to analyzing bureaucratic performance. The theory I develop here shifts our attention to the informal institutions that govern public behavior. I begin with an observation long made by scholars of organization and bureaucracy, namely, that norms, *informal* rules of the game, shape the expectations and behavior of public officials (Gouldner 1954; Kaufman 1967; Fox 1974). Weber's own theory identified rational-legal norms as the defining feature of the ideal bureaucracy. Yet he tended to equate these norms with the formal rules and procedures themselves, from which he thought autonomy and corporate commitment would universally emerge, motivating officials to apply rules in a fair and impartial manner (Gerth and Mills 1946). Questioning the assumptions behind rational-legal bureaucracy, Crozier (1964) called attention to the informal features of organization—unwritten rules, norms, and practices—that evolve with time as bureaucrats learn to cope with the hierarchies and power dynamics inside the organization. A chief contribution of his work was to challenge the claim that the exercise of bureaucratic authority, even in well-defined hierarchies was rational and unproblematic. Instead, he found that norms enable public officials to cope with organizational uncertainties, power asymmetry and conflict.

Building on this earlier work, I take bureaucratic norms to be uncoded yet widely shared understandings within public agencies that instruct officials on how to behave. Studies in public administration and management find that norms shape how agencies function. Among other things, norms can influence the degree of commitment among officials, their propensity to engage in collective behavior, and the course of action they deem appropriate in carrying out an agency's mission (Wilson 1989; Miller 1993; DiIulio 1994). A parallel set of studies of “street-level bureaucracy” have shown that organizational norms guide the judgments and behaviors of everyday frontline workers (e.g. school teachers, cops and labor inspectors), helping them filter complex ground realities and determine how to apply the rules fairly while responding to the needs of individual citizens (Lipsky 1980; Piore and Schrank 2008; Piore 2011).

At a micro-level, social theorists recognize that instrumental rationality—a matter of choosing the course of action that produces the highest expected material outcome for the agent concerned—provides insufficient grounds for explaining much of individual and collective action.¹⁹ Rather, they argue that individuals (and groups) also operate in accordance with norms—rules of conduct that instruct agents on how to behave under a given set of social conditions (Bourdieu 1977; Elster 1989). Norms help establish expectations and how alternatives are perceived and weighed. Crucially, they reflect the valuations and standards by which individuals judge an act, without reference to the immediate consequences or results of that act. Scholars examining a wide range of sociopolitical phenomena, from dominance and rebellion to the provision of public goods,

¹⁹ On models of rationality and their limits, see Elster's (1986) edited volume, *Rational Choice*.

have demonstrated how norms produce concrete behavioral outcomes (Ostrom 1990; Scott 1990; Petersen 2001).

Following Elster (1989), I understand norms to be rules of conduct that instruct agents on how to act under a given set of social conditions. In his theory of normative behavior, Elster identifies a variety of norms: (1) rules of thumb (e.g. don't judge a book by its cover), (2) norms of virtue or good character (e.g. show kindness to strangers), (3) norms of etiquette (e.g. take your hat off in church), and (4) moral norms (e.g. don't lie or cheat). Common to all of these norms are two characteristics. First, they are not outcome-oriented by design, meaning that the norms themselves do not point to actions producing outcomes we necessarily prefer. I may or may not enjoy the consequences, for example, of having to remove my hat in church. Norms in that sense can be distinguished from consequentialist principles of action like instrumental rationality, which requires an agent to pursue the course of action that best satisfies her preferences. To be sure, the *motivation* to comply with a norm can be instrumental. Fear of public reprimand may well move me to take my hat off in church. Yet the desirability of that action is independent of the norm itself. Second, norms do not simply describe patterns of behavior, but govern how people *ought* to behave. They are prescriptive in a practical sense, providing standards to guide individual behavior and evaluate the conduct of others.

Within a bureaucracy, norms provide standards and guidelines that determine which actions are mandatory, permissible, prohibited or even exemplary (Brinks 2006).²⁰ A public official's adherence to such standards is greeted with social approval or other rewards while deviation should arouse social disapproval or other forms of sanction. For purposes of analysis, bureaucratic norms carry two essential features: they are (1) broadly shared by officials in a bureaucracy and (2) sustained by acts of approval (or reward) and disapproval (or sanction) by agency members. The above two features help guide the process for investigating whether or not a norm is at work within a public agency. First, one must find evidence demonstrating that individuals working within the public agency possess a common understanding for how officials ought to behave, and make sense of their own and others' actions with reference to it. Second, there needs to be evidence showing that bureaucratic behaviors consistent with (or in violation of) the prevailing standards of conduct carry some form of social approval (or disapproval). Merely observing patterns of behavior that appear consistent with a hypothesized norm is not sufficient for establishing that the norm exists empirically. As one scholar has put it, "rules must have both *normativity*—in the limited sense that they provide a standard of conduct—and *facticity*—in the sense that they are actually enforced (Brinks 2006:204). I offer a method for the empirical validation of bureaucratic norms in Appendix D at the end of this chapter.

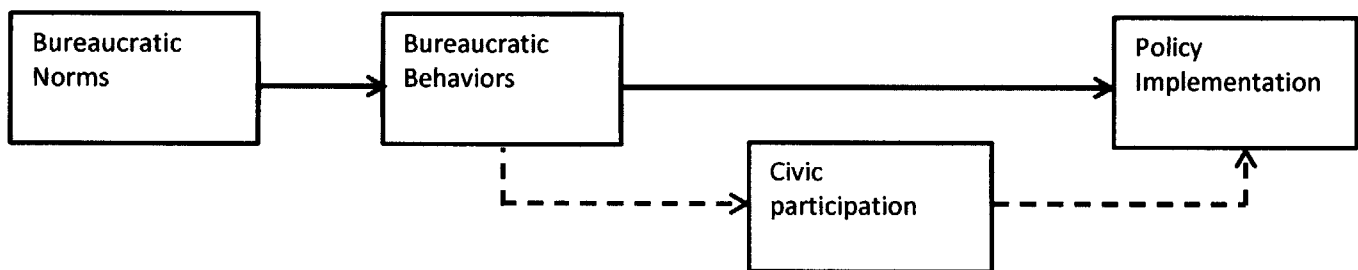
4.3. Bureaucratic Norms and Policy Implementation

The core of my argument is that the bureaucratic norms governing public agencies influence how effectively they implement universal primary education (see Figure 1.1.2). More specifically,

²⁰ While Brinks discusses norms that require, permit or prohibit certain actions, I add to this the significance of standards for exemplary action. As some philosophers have argued, supererogation, or action that goes above and beyond the call of duty, commands a distinct kind of moral approval or recognition. See, for example, J.S. Mill (1969), who hailed the special value of non-obligatory meritorious action.

bureaucratic norms shape the behavior of public officials as they carry out the critical tasks involved in implementing primary education, including school planning and provision, educational service delivery and monitoring and feedback. Norms influence how officials interpret and apply rules and procedures. They regulate the nature of communication and coordination across hierarchical boundaries, and crucially, the participation of lower-level bureaucrats. Furthermore, bureaucratic norms operate indirectly through their influence over civic participation. Along with input from the state, the implementation of universal primary schooling requires the engagement of citizens and civic agencies. Norms guide how public officials relate to citizens and civic groups outside the state. Civic actors, meanwhile, learn to adjust their expectations and behaviors based on their experiences with public agencies. The theoretical process by which bureaucratic norms are hypothesized to influence policy implementation thus consists of two causal channels: bureaucratic and civic. It is through the joint operation of both mechanisms that bureaucratic norms generate implementation outcomes.

Figure 1.1.2 Theoretical Process



Bureaucratic norms get reinforced through a variety of formal and informal practices within public agencies. Planning meetings and other organizational channels provide opportunities for bureaucrats to learn how they ought to interpret and carry out their responsibilities. They also give officials the opportunity to learn about each other's actions and communicate signs of approval or disapproval. More informally, senior officials can signal their appreciation or dissatisfaction with subordinates through routine communication. In other cases, they may resort to symbolic forms of recognition, for instance underscoring media accounts of agency efforts and achievements.²¹ By observing how senior officials and their colleagues behave, as well as how they respond to their peers, bureaucrats learn the behaviors associated with good governance.

Building on the above theoretical process, I propose two distinct sets of bureaucratic norms, deliberative and legalistic, which produce divergent patterns of behavior and yield varying outcomes for policy implementation. When bureaucratic norms are *deliberative*, public agencies are responsive to local needs and thus implement primary education policy effectively. Public officials subject to deliberative norms are encouraged to discuss practical matters of implementation across formal organizational divides, coordinate efforts to solve problems collectively, and adapt official rules and policies to meet ground realities. They lead public officials to seek input from citizens and civic

²¹ Tendler's (1997) examination of the public health program in Ceara, a traditionally underperforming province of Brazil, highlights the mechanism of media scrutiny and recognition.

organizations outside the state, encouraging local communities to engage in collective action to monitor the functioning of primary schools. Meanwhile, when bureaucratic norms are *legalistic*, agencies operate in a more rigid and hierarchical fashion, which leads to much less effective implementation. Legalism encourages officials to adhere strictly to official procedures, maintain organizational boundaries, and apply policies in a narrow, uniform manner across diverse contexts. Public officials tend to marginalize civic agencies and exclude citizens from the policy implementation process. The impulse within communities to organize collectively around primary education is dampened as a consequence, which undermines local monitoring of primary schools.

While they do not always refer explicitly to bureaucratic norms, field-based studies of governance in developing countries have arrived at similar insights. In her study of public bureaucracies in Brazil, Tandler (1997) finds that local agencies in the northeastern province of Ceará encouraged frontline health workers to engage with local communities, not only by way of material inducements but through symbolic gestures such as public information campaigns and prizes for good performance. Within the Indian context, studies of effective public service delivery find that agencies that encourage repeated informal interaction across divisional boundaries, as well as between public officials, citizens and elected leaders, can help foster and sustain innovative practices (Chand 2006). In a similar vein, research on co-production arrangements, where local agencies and citizens collectively manage policy implementation, have examined conditions under which bureaucracies can foster greater participation from local officials and input from citizens (Ostrom 1996; Joshi and Moore 2004). In his study of effective irrigation systems in Taiwan, for example, Lam (1996) finds that notwithstanding what appeared to be rigid formal rules delineating the roles and responsibilities of local agencies, informal norms within the bureaucracy encouraged flexibility in the application of policies and promoted engagement between farmers and local officials.

4.4. *Alternative Paths: Deliberative and Legalistic*

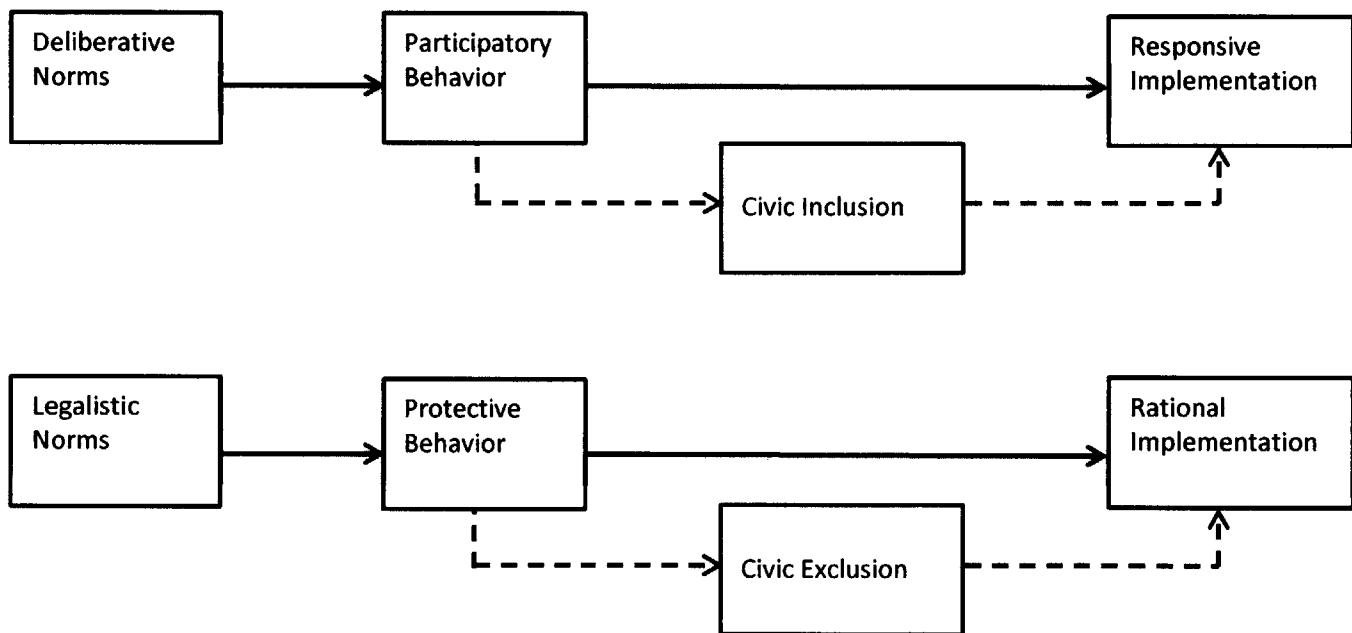
I have so far described in general terms how bureaucratic norms influence policy implementation. I now delineate in greater detail the mechanisms by which the two alternative paths—deliberative and legalistic—generate divergent outcomes for the implementation of universal primary education. As the discussion proceeds, it helps to bear in mind that deliberative and legalistic norms are ideal types. They are analytical constructs that clarify and even accentuate certain elements of bureaucratic organization, which aids in the process of drawing comparisons across concrete cases (Giddens 1973: 141-143).²² While no bureaucracy operates in perfect accordance with the deliberative or legalistic model, the two ideal types put forward here capture the central tendencies one can observe across the empirical cases under investigation. A graphical representation of how the alternative paths operate is provided below in **Figure 1.1.3**.

My formulation of deliberative norms builds on the insights from the literature on deliberation and participatory governance. This line of research draws its normative commitments from the work of political philosophers writing on deliberative democracy, particularly Joshua

²² The notion of ideal types used here comes from Weber. For his original statement of the method of ideal type theorizing and its purpose within social science, see Weber, Max, "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy," *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (New York: Free Press, 1949).

Cohen (1989) and Jürgen Habermas (1998), who have argued that the practice of deliberation, communication and public justification can advance democratic ideals. It aims to identify institutional arrangements that can produce more substantive forms of citizen participation and promote the collective good.²³ It starts with the recognition that public institutions often lack the information, know-how and resources to carry out critical functions of the state, from the regulation of private firms to the provision of public services. Bureaucracies possessing highly centralized, hierarchical authority are found to be ill-suited to the complexities associated with implementing public policy (Sabel 1994; Fung and Wright 2001). Instead, the literature finds promise in more deliberative forms of organization, which promote collective discussion and problem-solving across organizational divisions and between public officials and citizens (Cohen and Sabel 1997).

Figure 1.1.3 Alternative Paths: Deliberative and Legalistic



Though it has focused primarily on the formal features of deliberative organizations, I extend the insights of this research to the norms governing public agencies as well. I take deliberation to be the mutual give and take of reasons and arguments directed towards common goals (Fung 2002: 69). Deliberative norms encourage public officials to engage in collective

²³ See the volume edited by Fung and Wright (2003) for a theoretical statement and examples of empirical work along these lines. In addition, a growing number of studies analyze how deliberative institutions function in practice, from participatory budgeting in Brazil to gram panchayats in India (Isaac and Heller 2003; Baiocchi 2005; Rao and Sanyal 2010).

discussion regarding how implementation ought to proceed. They promote open and candid communication across the organizational hierarchy. Lower-level bureaucrats learn to participate in collective decision-making, discuss practical concerns and share their experiences with seniors, thereby allowing local knowledge to move up the hierarchy. Senior officials, meanwhile, come to value ground-level experiences and information held by their subordinates, which then feeds back into the planning process.

In the interest of solving problems, bureaucrats across the hierarchy take a flexible approach to implementation and learn to adapt policies to meet the varying needs of local communities. In contrast to the legalistic model I present below, deliberative norms encourage officials to exercise discretion to depart from the rules and respond to the requirements of the task at hand (Sabel and Zeitlin 2011). As studies of regulatory agencies have shown, when public officials enjoy flexibility in interpreting the rules, they are more responsive to the needs of individual cases (Silbey 1984; Selznick 1994; Braithwaite 2006). They are also better able to work across organizational boundaries, which helps expand the resources available for enforcing the law (Silbey, Huising et al. 2009; Pires 2011). In a similar vein, deliberative norms lead to responsive policy implementation by encouraging officials to coordinate across divisions of the state and adapt policies to suit varying local contexts.

Along with shaping bureaucratic behavior, there is a second channel through which deliberative norms lead to responsive implementation, namely the path of civic participation. Public agencies governed by deliberative norms promote the input and participation of citizens and civic groups. Public officials learn to go beyond their officially-sanctioned roles and organizational boundaries to establish ties with societal groups that can aid in policy implementation. To use Scott's (1998) terms, deliberative norms allow the state to "see" the possibilities of partnership with citizens and civic agencies. In much the same way that senior officials encourage input from their subordinates, local public officials learn to draw upon the knowledge and organizational resources of citizens and civic agencies, whose collective input can aid in the policy implementation process. The inclusive behavior of public officials helps reinforce the participation of local communities, who experience tangible benefits of collective action around primary schooling.

In contrast to the deliberative model, I conceptualize an alternative process driven by legalistic norms governing bureaucracy. Legalism, according to philosophers of law, refers to a general attitude, ethos or ideology that holds moral conduct to be a matter of following the rules (Shklar 1964). Legalistic norms invoke rule following and deference to official hierarchies and procedures. Weber's formulation of the ideal bureaucracy could be interpreted as the foremost example of legalism applied to the state. It envisions the impartial application of general rules on society by public officials having an unwavering commitment to rational-legal norms. However, unlike the ideal Weberian bureaucracy, I do not assume that legalism derives from the formal features of the bureaucracy itself. Nor do I assume it to be universally "rational" in the sense that it operates the same everywhere regardless of sociopolitical context. Rather, legalism encapsulates a particular set of norms that promote the strict interpretation of rules, policies and procedures. Legalism induces protective behaviors among bureaucrats, who learn to uphold official hierarchies and divisional boundaries, thereby limiting the scope of coordination across divisions of the state. With a view towards preventing societal encroachment over the state, the flow of communication and decision-making across the hierarchy tends to follow official channels from the top down, as bureaucrats learn to value the rules over local knowledge.

Subject to legalistic norms, lower-level bureaucrats interpret their mandate in narrow terms and apply policies in a rigid, uniform manner across cases. When they attempt to question official policy based on their experiences in the field, lower-level bureaucrats are met with disapproval. By the same token, they also learn to downplay the significance of local knowledge and maintain a strict interpretation of what actions policies require. To bend policies according to the needs of communities carries the risk of local political interference or even capture, which officials seek to avoid. As Canales (2011) observes in his study of microfinance loan officers in Mexico, agents that adhere strictly to the “letter of the law” understand official policies as binding constraints that prescribe a narrow course of action, thereby deferring to official hierarchy and renouncing their own discretionary authority. The result is a policy implementation process that is fully rational, within the narrow mandate of official policy and uniform in its application across cases.

Along with its impact on bureaucratic behavior, legalistic norms also operate through the channel of civic behavior. Legalistic norms discourage public officials from developing ties with societal groups in the policy implementation process. Bureaucrats learn to resist the input and participation of citizens and civic agencies, whose influence is understood to interfere with the internal operations of the state. In areas of policy where community participation is prescribed, bureaucrats choose to work only through officially-recognized agencies and channels, excluding groups that are unrecognized by the state. Again, that is not to suggest that local collective action around primary schooling could not thrive on its own. Citizens can, in theory, contribute to primary schooling irrespective of how public agencies operate. However, their collective efforts are likely to be dampened in areas of implementation that require coordination with public agencies. Faced with the exclusionary tendencies within the state, citizens and civic groups learn to adjust their expectations and collective behaviors accordingly. Taken together, the combination of protective behavior by bureaucrats and civic exclusion produces a rational implementation process, one that aims to preserve official authority within the state while limiting the scope for societal interference.

To see more concretely how these two alternative models produce varying implementation outcomes, it helps to break apart the administrative tasks involved in the delivery universal primary education.²⁴ **Figure 1.1.4** below summarizes the major activities associated with implementing India’s policies for universal primary education. It also provides a short description of how public agencies governed by deliberative versus legalistic norms are theorized to carry out each task. These tasks can be divided into three broad categories: (1) school planning and provision, (2) delivery of educational services, and (3) system monitoring and feedback. While the first category involves activities related to *quantitative* improvements, like the development of physical infrastructure and school facilities, the latter two sets of activities are more closely tied to the *quality* of service delivery. System monitoring and local feedback is particularly relevant to education quality, since the daily functioning of primary schools is largely outside the hands of state planners.

Consider first the activities associated with school planning and provision. India’s primary education policies aim to achieve universal access through the construction of new schools in underserved communities. In carrying out that task, public agencies governed by deliberative norms will tend to encourage broad participation from officials across the organizational hierarchy, along with elected leaders and civic agencies working at the grassroots level. Through the mutual exchange of ideas and information, school development plans are tailored to address varying local

²⁴ The list of administrative tasks was developed based on extensive interviews with public officials, educationists, civic agencies and school teachers.

needs. Similarly, local agencies involved in carrying out new school construction will tend to consult with local communities in deciding where to place new schools, even when doing so may break with official rules. As a result, agencies are more likely to meet the needs facing communities.

Public agencies governed by legalistic norms will tend to follow a different course of action. Rather than promote broad participation, they seek to avoid local demands and political interference while planning the development of new schools. They tend to confine the task of school infrastructure planning within a designated sub-division of the bureaucracy with little outside input or engagement. When deciding where to construct a school building, bureaucrats adhere strictly to rules regarding village population size and school distance.²⁵ Whether communities express the need for school infrastructure or not is of secondary concern. Nevertheless, the strict adherence to well-specified rules and targets helps ensure that school infrastructure is provided uniformly across communities.

Figure 1.1.4 Bureaucratic Norms and Administrative Tasks

Administrative Tasks	Legalistic Norms	Deliberative Norms
<i>School planning and provision</i>		
School infrastructure development	-Conduct planning process within dedicated agency and restrict outside input or interference	-Conduct deliberative planning process with input from multiple agencies and civic actors
Regional planning and policy targeting	-Apply policies uniformly across different regions and social groups	-Adapt policies to suit the context across different regions and social groups
<i>Educational service delivery</i>		
Teacher posting	-Apply uniform, rational procedure for allocation of teachers across schools	-Apply flexible teacher allocation process according to school needs
Academic support	-Provide academic resources in uniform, top-down process	- Coordinate with school teachers and civic agencies to provide academic resources
Community support	-Work with officially-recognized school agencies within the areas mandated by policy	-Work with both official and unofficial groups to identify and address school needs
<i>Monitoring and feedback</i>		
System monitoring	-Follow top-down school inspection model and identify gaps through official surveys	-Combine official inspections and surveys with unofficial, community-based monitoring
Local feedback	-Incorporate local feedback through official channels	- Incorporate local feedback from informal groups and through unofficial channels

²⁵ According to India's primary education policies, the state is required to provide all rural habitations of a certain population size access to a primary school within a distance of one kilometer.

While school infrastructure planning in India carries well-specific targets and requires comparatively little community input, regional planning and policy targeting is quite the opposite. India's primary education policies provide resources for states to implement special programs to address the distinct needs facing underperforming regions and disadvantaged social groups (e.g. disabled children and out-of-school girls). Agencies governed by deliberative norms will tend to interpret these policies flexibly and adapt them to the varying conditions of different regions and social groups. For example, they will tend to coordinate with local officials from underserved regions and draw input from civic agencies working with disadvantaged social groups to tailor programs in a context-specific manner. As a result, these policies are more likely to reach intended recipients and address their educational needs. By contrast, agencies governed by legalistic norms will tend to adopt a narrow interpretation of these policies. Regional planning will involve little coordination across the official hierarchy, and the involvement of non-state agencies will be limited. Officials will tend to implement regional and targeted policies in much the same way they carry out school infrastructure projects, in a top-down, uniform manner across regions and social groups, producing far less effective results.

Consider further the provision of academic support in the delivery of educational services. To aid in the teaching and learning process, India's primary education policies provide a bundle of academic resources (e.g. reference materials and teaching supplies) for each school. They also call for the provision of library books to help create a learning environment within schools. Public agencies governed by deliberative norms will tend to coordinate efforts across the bureaucratic hierarchy to determine the most appropriate means of delivering these resources to schools when they are needed. They may, for example, coordinate with school teachers informally during training sessions outside of class. Or in the case of libraries, they may enlist the support of local NGOs to provide library books and academic support in underserved communities. Consequently, primary schools are more likely to have these resources available for teachers and students to use. By contrast, agencies governed by legalistic norms will tend to supply academic resources in a uniform, top-down fashion according to the official planning calendar. Local officials will tend not to coordinate with school teachers or civic agencies in determining when and how to provide teaching supplies or library books. Instead, they will deliver them based on directives from within the bureaucracy. Depending on local conditions, schools may or may not receive these materials in time to make use of them. Consequently, schools are less likely to have these academic resources available for use.

Finally, consider the activities around monitoring and feedback, the mechanisms by which public agencies try to ensure that the education system is functioning well. Bureaucrats have in theory a range of possible methods at their disposal for monitoring the education system. Agencies operating according to deliberative norms will tend to combine the official school inspection system with unofficial mechanisms of feedback from local communities, which are often better situated to identify problems. Importantly, they will seek input not only from formally recognized bodies such as Village Education Committees (VECs), but also informal groups at the village level, such as women's associations. Given the fact that formal village institutions in India are often dominated by privileged social groups, the ability to work with informal groups at the village level allows agencies to identify and respond to the problems facing marginalized communities. With the encouragement of local agencies, community groups are more likely to invest the time and resources to keep a check on primary schooling and report gaps in service delivery. As a result, monitoring systems are more likely to ensure that schools are functioning well.

Meanwhile, agencies governed by legalistic norms will tend to follow the standard, top-down system of school inspection. The standard inspection model requires local administration to conduct a fixed number of school visits per month and run through a checklist of items related to infrastructure, the Midday Meal Program, and so on. Inspections are supplemented by official surveys conducted by school teachers to identify out-of-school children and other potential gaps in policy implementation. Notwithstanding acute resource constraints and other limitations facing the inspection system, public officials will tend to discourage feedback from agencies outside the state, such as local NGOs and community groups. In the same way that senior officials tend to downplay the local knowledge held by their subordinates, local officials see little reason to use the information provided by non-state agencies. By following standard inspection procedures and limiting the range of feedback to official information sources, bureaucrats avoid outside interference. In so doing, however, they dissuade local communities from collectively monitoring primary schooling. Moreover, the application of standard inspection procedures is likely to disempower marginalized citizens, who are often reluctant to report formal complaints. As a consequence, the monitoring system is less likely to ensure that schools are functioning well.

To summarize the argument, when public agencies are governed by deliberative norms, policy implementation is more responsive to local needs. Bureaucrats learn to coordinate across hierarchical boundaries, adapt policies to suit varying conditions and encourage participation from citizens and civic agencies in policy implementation. Such agencies are, as a result, effective in carrying out a majority of tasks associated with implementing universal primary education policy. They are likely to achieve not only high levels of infrastructure provision, but well-functioning schools with high quality educational services as well. When public agencies operate according to legalistic norms, meanwhile, policy implementation tends to follow the rules rather than local needs. Bureaucrats learn to uphold official hierarchies, apply policies in a rigid, uniform manner across cases, and discourage input from citizens and civic agencies. Such agencies are, as a result, less effective in carrying a majority of tasks associated with implementing universal primary education. While they can achieve high levels of infrastructure provision, they are likely to produce schools that function poorly and deliver low quality educational services.

4.4. Bureaucratic Norms and Democratic Governance

Having presented my theory of how bureaucratic norms influence the implementation of universal primary education, I now consider how the theory relates more broadly to democracy and civil society in India. As mentioned, earlier, alternative approaches for understanding the quality of public institutions highlight the role of democratic governance and civic participation. In a vibrant, multiethnic democracy like India's, no study of primary education would be complete without accounting for the democratic and civic context in which public agencies are embedded. How do public agencies governed by bureaucratic norms operate within India's democratic system, and in particular, the system of clientelism and caste politics? How do public officials navigate the vast, socially heterogeneous terrain of Indian civil society? In this final sub-section I discuss how the theory of bureaucratic norms and the research design of this study address these features of governance in India.

4.4.1. Democratic Governance

Many argue that democratic institutions lead to better social outcomes by enhancing the responsiveness of state agencies to citizens' needs. Through representative channels like competitive elections, disadvantaged citizens can hold officials accountable for advancing their interests within the state. Scholars writing on the politics of welfare and redistribution observe a connection between democratic institutions and governmental expenditures for the poor (Przeworski 1986; Skocpol and Amenta 1986; Esping-Anderson 1990). In the context of developing countries, many find that democracies outperform authoritarian regimes in the provision of public services like health and education (Brown and Hunter 1999; Przeworski, Alvares et al. 2000; Lake and Baum 2001; Deacon 2009). Yet a growing number of studies question the supposed link between democracy, social policy and human development (Keefer and Khemani 2004; Stasavage 2005; Ross 2006). While it may be the case that democratic governments tend to *finance* social policy at a higher level than authoritarian regimes, there is little to suggest that these services always reach their intended beneficiaries, let alone produce desirable outcomes like improved literacy or lower infant mortality.²⁶

With more than sixty years of nearly uninterrupted democratic rule, India may well be the most successful democracy in the developing world. Moreover, with the recent political mobilization of lower caste groups, it may well be the only large democracy where voter turnout among traditionally marginalized citizens—those who are most likely to benefit from primary education policies—is markedly higher than among the privileged (Yadav 2002). Yet the abysmal quality of public services in India poses a puzzle for theories of democratic accountability. Kapur and Mukhopadhyay (2007) document well over a hundred governmental anti-poverty programs active in India. The failure of most of these programs has been broadcast widely among governing elites through official reviews and audits, and yet they continue to receive an outpouring of resources. The lesson seems to be that India's democracy is far better at producing policies than realizing them through in the implementation process.

Why do Indian voters, especially those belonging to poor and marginalized communities, participate zealously in a democratic process that has done little to improve their quality of life? Perhaps the most convincing arguments center on the role of clientelism in Indian politics. Clientelist systems are characterized by particularistic transactions, in which citizens surrender votes in exchange for private, material benefits from political patrons (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). As Heller (2000) points out, the pervasiveness of clientelism in India—a form of political subordination in exchange for material rewards—renders democracy largely procedural and relatively ineffective in addressing the substantive needs of citizens, particularly the poor. Similarly, others have observed that political parties in India tend to compete not on programmatic policy platforms but on their ability to control local access to state resources, often through caste- and other identity-based channels (Chhibber 1995; Chandra 2004). The drawback for policy implementation is that, while clientelism favors informal, targeted transfers of excludable goods, it undermines institutionalized provision of universal public services like health and education, an outcome that is all the more aggravated by limited information, social cleavages and inequality among voters (Keefer and Khemani 2004).

²⁶ For a discussion of governance failures in public service delivery across the developing world see the World Bank's 2004 World Development Report: *World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People* (World Bank 2003).

These studies suggest that poor implementation in India stems not from a lack of democracy *per se* but the nature of party politics and political ties between voters and politicians. Seeking to reward their supporters with selective benefits, elected officials may try to exert influence over the bureaucracy. One form of political influence is found to occur through the transfer and reassignment of bureaucrats.²⁷ Yet the system of bureaucratic transfers is no less pervasive in states like Kerala and Himachal Pradesh, which are considered examples of good governance in India. Moreover, the very fact that Uttar Pradesh, a state notorious for its highly divisive caste politics, has made remarkable gains in the provision of school infrastructure poses a puzzle for theories that assume that universal public goods could not be delivered under clientelist systems. Still, the system of bureaucratic transfers may well reduce the quality of public administration in India, even when agencies are governed by deliberative norms. To address that question, we would need to carry out a comparative study of clientelism that connects patterns of voter-politician linkages to variation in the operation of public agencies. An investigation of that kind is beyond the scope of this study.

Nevertheless, the theory of bureaucratic norms I put forward here can contribute to our understanding of democratic governance in India. I share the view that procedural democracy does not ensure the substantive participation of marginalized citizens. In much the same way that formal democratic procedures do not sufficiently promote substantive citizen participation, I argue that bureaucratic procedures carried out in a legalistic manner by public agencies are unlikely to enhance policy implementation. Unlike much recent literature, however, I do not assume that clientelism or even caste politics necessarily undermines the bureaucracy's ability to implement universal policies.²⁸ Studies tend to paint India's bureaucracy as a victim, forced to work under the control of corrupt principals. Absent field-based evidence, however, they leave open the question of how public officials negotiate political pressures in performing their duties. According to the theory I put forward here, public officials subject to legalistic norms tend to adopt a narrow definition of the rules and adhere strictly to procedures as a way to avoid political interference. In public agencies governed by deliberative norms, meanwhile, bureaucrats tend to consult with elected officials and adapt policies to suit the varying needs of their constituents. Whether and how these alternative approaches address clientelistic pressures is worthy of investigation.

While a thoroughgoing investigation of clientelism is beyond the scope of this study, the research design and methods I use allow me to probe how bureaucratic norms relate to democratic governance. I take explicit account of political party systems, which have been found to effect the provision of public goods (Chhibber and Nooruddin 2004). In the matched-pair of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, I hold party system constant, as both states have a two-party system comprised of India's two national parties--the Congress Party and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The comparison allows me to analyze how distinct sets of bureaucratic norms operate under the same party system. Meanwhile, the study of Uttar Pradesh, which is governed by a mix of regional parties that make overt claims to represent particular caste groups, allows me to examine how agencies subject to legalistic norms operate in very different party system. Fieldwork provided opportunities to observe how public agencies relate with local elected leaders and village councils (panchayats). While it may be that clientelism in India's democracy undermines the delivery of public services,

²⁷ In one of the few studies on the subject, Iyer and Mani (2009) observe significant political influence over the bureaucracy through the transfer and reassignment of officers. They find that officers that exhibit high ability are no more likely to be rewarded with assignments to more important posts than other officers, and that transfers may also lead bureaucrats to invest less in skills, which can undermine the quality of administration.

²⁸ On that point, the collection of studies of clientism found in Piattoni (2001) offer a useful corrective.

field evidence from Himachal Pradesh, a truly exceptional performer in primary education, reveals a relatively well-functioning education system that is rife with clientelism.

4.4.2. *Rethinking Civil Society*

According to a second body of research, civil society strengthens the performance of public institutions. A vibrant associational life produces social capital—norms and networks of trust and reciprocity—which enables citizens to overcome problems of collective action and coordinate effectively to make demands on the state (Putnam, Leonardi et al. 1994).²⁹ While this body of research draws primarily from the experience of advanced industrial countries, studies from across the developing world associate civic engagement and social capital with a wide range of policy outcomes, from poverty reduction and public goods provision, to interethnic cooperation and communal peace (Narayan and Pritchett 1999; Varshney 2001; Krishna 2003; Miguel 2004).³⁰ With its traditions of nonviolent civil disobedience and Gandhian volunteerism, civic participation may be an appropriate place to search for the mechanisms underlying effective policy implementation.

Setting aside a great many conceptual and normative disagreements, there is little scholarly consensus regarding the nature and extent of civil society in India.³¹ Scholars of India's social movements and the NGO sector describe a terrain rich in civic resources with a wide range of associations making collective demands on the state (Heller 1999; Ray and Katzenstein 2005; Jenkins 2007). Survey research, on the other hand, finds low levels of reported membership in formal associations, suggesting that Indian civil society is much thinner than might appear (Chhibber 2001; Chhibber, Shastri et al. 2004). It may also be the case that survey instruments are too blunt to capture the informal networks and associations that operate in rural India (Krishna 2003). A separate literature on ethnic divisions and public goods observes that Indian society suffers from fragmentation along caste, tribal and religious lines, which appears to undermines the provision of public goods and services (Banerjee, Iyer et al. 2005). All in all, these studies leave the effect of Indian civil society on governance ambiguous.

I embrace this ambiguity and treat civil society as a complementary, rather than competing, explanation for policy implementation. The theory of bureaucratic norms I propose takes explicit account of civic participation, but leaves open the question of its efficacy. The reason to incorporate civic participation into the model rests on the empirical fact that rural primary schooling is a community-based institution that cannot exist apart from the social relations upon which it is embedded (Coleman 1988). Perhaps more than any other policy domain, primary education hinges on the participation of local communities and civic groups. India's policy framework for universal primary education, which builds on the global Education for All campaign, thus calls for the

²⁹ See for example the following studies: Brehm and Rahn (1997), Knack and Keefer (1997), and Knack (2002).

³⁰ For a critical review of social capital theory, see Portes (1998) and Woolcock and Narayan (2000).

³¹ The very use of the term "civil society" is hotly contested by scholars of Indian politics. Some argue that most Indian citizens, particularly the poor, are part of a "political society", in which the terms of political access and exchanged are dominated by principles of communalism and corruption, far from the democratic ideal of free and equal citizenship that informs many theories of civil society (Kaviraj 2002; Chatterjee 2006).

participation of local communities and civil society groups in implementation.³² Yet the extent and quality of participation, particularly among local communities, is thought to vary considerably.

Some argue that the nature of social divisions and caste hierarchies across India determine the extent of civic participation. For example, in the case of Uttar Pradesh, Drèze and Sen (2002) observe that traditional caste divisions impede local collective action and lead to public neglect around basic services like education and health. By contrast, they argue that primary schools in the state of Kerala function much better due to greater community vigilance. Implicit in their account is the assumption that social structure ultimately drives or hinders community action around primary education. By the same token, the widely-heralded PROBE study on primary education in north India associated the well-functioning school system in Himachal Pradesh with comparative high levels of local collective action, aided in part by less divisive caste relations in the Himalayan region (PROBE Team 1999).

As the above studies indicate, social divisions and caste norms continue to play a significant role in rural India, and their significance for collective action cannot be overlooked. I address the issue of social structure in my selection of cases. The hill states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand share very similar caste compositions and both have a history of collective village institutions, which aids in the matched-pair comparison. Meanwhile, Uttar Pradesh has a highly fragmented caste composition with a history of social exclusion and economic exploitation of lower castes, which provides a least-likely case for civic participation. Similarly, at the village-level I examine cases of both relatively homogeneous caste communities along with highly fragmented ones to account for the possible influence of caste composition over civic participation.

Yet I would also caution against overstating (and oversimplifying) the significance of social structure. As village-level studies have shown, the capacity for collective action cannot simply be read off the number of caste divisions within a community (Somanathan, Prabhakar et al. 2002; Krishna 2003).³³ Nor is it appropriate to assume that historical legacies of caste exclusion forever condemn communities to civic disengagement. The theory of bureaucratic norms I advance here draws our attention the critical function that public agencies can play in harnessing the civic capabilities of citizens. When bureaucratic norms are deliberative, officials will tend to encourage civic participation in the implementation process. When agencies are governed by legalistic norms, officials will tend to exclude citizens and civic agencies. A vibrant associational life, while perhaps valuable in its own right, does not alone produce effective policy implementation according to my theory. Rather, the efficacy of civic participation is conditional on the norms governing public agencies.

To clarify, I do not mean to suggest that civic participation is a mere function of bureaucratic norms within the state. The presence (or absence) of civil society and the extent and quality of civic engagement can be shaped by any number of factors external to the operation of public institutions. The earlier discussion on research design touched upon some of these factors

³² The Dakar Framework for Action, signed by 164 countries participating in UNESCO's global Education for All campaign, pledged to "ensure the engagement and participation of civil society in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of strategies for educational development." (UNESCO 2000: 8)

³³ The impact of social heterogeneity on collective action may be more ambiguous than we may think. As the research on forest resource management shows, caste heterogeneity does not always have an adverse impact on collective action (Poteete and Ostrom 2004).

(e.g. levels of economic development, social heterogeneity, the presence of village associations, etc.) identified in studies analyzing village-level characteristics that shape policy implementation. What I propose here is more modest. Given a set of civic organizations and capabilities within a society, bureaucratic norms influence whether and how those capabilities are brought to bear in the implementation process. When civic action is directed at the state, bureaucratic norms shape how public officials respond, which in turn can influence the nature and extent of civic input in policy implementation. None of that is to say that the norms governing public agencies unilaterally determine civic participation.

At the same time, however, it is important not to discount the role of public institutions in helping to foster and strengthen the participation of citizens in policy implementation. Under conditions of entrenched social inequality and exclusion, which characterizes much of rural India, marginalized citizens face significant barriers to accessing the state. In the domain of education, moreover, social norms continue to restrict the participation of lower caste children, girls, and other disadvantaged groups. The encounters such groups have with public agencies can play a foundational role in how they come to see the state and their relation to it as citizens (Corbridge, Williams et al. 2005). How public agencies respond to the collective demands of marginalized citizens shape their expectations regarding the benefits of further collective action. In theorizing the process by which bureaucratic norms shape civic action, I follow the line of reasoning established in a number of studies that find that public institutions can, over repeated interactions, help foster, sustain and enhance the efficacy of civil society and social capital (Ostrom 1996; Fox 1997; Braithwaite and Levi 1998; Locke 2003).³⁴

1.5. Overview of Dissertation

This dissertation relies on a series of subnational comparisons and nested case studies to analyze variation in the performance of public agencies implementing universal primary education in India. The research examines implementation within the Hindi-speaking belt of north India, a region that is often described as uniformly backwards yet shows striking variation in outcomes for primary education. I closely analyze implementation within three geographically contiguous states—Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand—that show maximal variation while controlling for a host of political economy factors. In the empirical chapters of this study, I trace the full chain of governance within each of these three states, from the state capital down to the village. I examine how bureaucratic norms operate at multiple levels of administration (state, district and village). Fieldwork conducted at these multiple levels reveals the impact of bureaucratic norms over the policy implementation process. The case study chapters establish the presence of bureaucratic norms, the chief explanatory variable, within each state and test the propositions of the theory over a range of activities associated with policy implementation, from school planning and infrastructure development to educational service delivery and local monitoring. The outline below details the contribution of each chapter to the overall study.

³⁴ To explain the uneven development of civil society in Mexico, for example, Fox (1997) offers a “political construction” approach that analyzes the recursive cycles of interaction between the state and societal actors. As he aptly puts it: “Associational life does not unfold in a vacuum: state or external societal actors can provide either positive incentives or negative sanctions for collective action” (Fox 1997: 121).

I begin in Chapter 2 by setting out the empirical context of the study. I present an overview of the Indian government's national policy framework and budgetary commitments to primary education. While the central government's role in the social sector has increased with the enactment of several new policies, India's federal structure provides state governments with greater authority over policy implementation. I examine in more detail the trends and recent outcomes in primary education across India, and discuss systematic hurdles affecting the school system, including weak administrative capacity, poor teacher accountability, and inequalities around caste and gender. At the same time, some regions perform significantly better than others, bringing the empirical puzzle of the dissertation into sharp relief. I then shift attention to the roles and responsibilities of bureaucratic and civic agencies working in the domain of primary education. I describe the administrative makeup of India's education bureaucracy, including the formal hierarchy, modes of recruitment and career trajectories. As the discussion makes clear, the formal incentives and administrative structure of the Indian education bureaucracy cannot explain the variation in implementation outcomes across states. I then examine the range of civic actors involved in education and their relationship to the state, particularly within the context of policies to decentralize governance and foster local community participation. Finally, I consider the challenge that public agencies face in trying to evoke participation from marginalized communities, particularly in light of the social divisions and entrenched inequalities that characterize much of rural north India.

I then turn to an analysis of the empirical cases in Chapters 3-5. I start in Chapter 3 with the case of Himachal Pradesh (HP), an exceptional performer in the sphere of primary education. I situate HP's achievements in light of its unfavorable conditions, including widespread illiteracy at the time of independence, the harsh physical environment in the Himalayan region, and relatively low levels of economic development and urbanization. Second, I go on to discuss the role of the state and provide detailed evidence for how public agencies operate in practice. Through interviews and participant-observation, I establish the presence of deliberative norms within HP's education bureaucracy. Public officials in HP work collectively to bend official rules, interpret policies and procedures flexibly, and incorporate civic actors in the implementation process. I then connect these norms to the outcomes for policy implementation through a series of case studies conducted at the state and local-level. Findings show how deliberative norms shape bureaucratic behavior around the critical tasks for policy implementation, enabling the state to respond to varying local needs and redress inequalities in access across regions and social groups. Beyond improved access, findings at the village-level reveal how local agencies respond to the collective demands of community groups, encouraging further civic action that improves the functioning of schools and leads to better outcomes for educational service delivery. Finally, I consider potential limitations of the deliberative model in HP. As rapid income growth and privatization undermine social cohesion in some parts of the state, public agencies may face new challenges as they attempt to foster local collective action around primary schooling.

Chapter 4 analyzes the mixed achievements of Uttarakhand, a newly established state that was carved out from the hill region of Uttar Pradesh. This chapter constitutes an important test for my theory. It demonstrates the endurance of bureaucratic norms under a new state government and political party system. Uttarakhand provides an ideal matched-pair comparison with Himachal Pradesh, allowing me to assess the differential impact of bureaucratic norms on policy implementation. I discuss Uttarakhand's mixed performance in implementing universal primary education. The state has achieved remarkable gains in terms of infrastructure expansion and access to schooling. Yet primary schools function poorly and deliver exceedingly low quality education, which is puzzling in light of the region's historically high literacy and collective action around

education. To explain these mixed results, I first establish the persistence of legalistic norms within Uttarakhand's bureaucracy following its break from UP. Notwithstanding the new state's political mandate—to improve the responsiveness of government to the local needs of the hill population—public officials continue to adhere strictly to uniform rules, procedures and policies, while at the same time marginalizing civic input and participation. I connect legalistic norms within the state to the implementation outcomes for primary education policy in Uttarakhand through a series of case studies drawn from the state and local level. In sharp contrast to the responsive implementation process observed within HP, fieldwork in Uttarakhand reveal that public officials tend to disregard civic input and ignore local demands, which has driven communities to exit the government system and seek private schooling options.

Chapter 5 analyzes the severe underperformance of Uttar Pradesh (UP), India's largest state. I begin by situating the task of implementing universal primary education in the context of social inequalities and recent political mobilization of lower caste groups in UP. According to much recent scholarship, the prevalence of caste politics in UP has undermined the state's ability to deliver universal primary schooling. At the same time, however, the state has made notable progress in the expansion of school infrastructure over the last decade, an outcome that is not explained by UP's unfavorable economic, social and political conditions. Second, I present my explanation for the highly mixed performance of UP, which centers on norms governing public agencies. Fieldwork reveals an administrative legacy of legalism that continues to operate within the state. Public officials in UP tend to interpret rules and mandates strictly, apply policies uniformly across cases, and adhere to official hierarchies, while at the same time marginalizing the input of societal actors. I connect these norms to the mixed outcomes for policy implementation in UP through a series of nested case studies. Legalistic norms have enabled dedicated agencies within the state to carry out their official mandate for school infrastructure provision, while protecting them from political interference. Meanwhile, these same norms constrain their ability to deliver services like the Midday Meal effectively. Village case studies demonstrate the tendency of local bureaucrats stifle the demands of community groups, even those having strong formal representation within local government. I show how the unresponsiveness of local bureaucracy has undermined collective action around primary schooling, leading to poor quality in educational service delivery.

In Chapter 6, I conclude with a discussion of the dissertation's broader theoretical significance and policy implications. The central findings of the study, that bureaucratic norms influence how effectively public agencies implement primary education in India, raise a natural question regarding the origin of bureaucratic norms. As the study highlights, bureaucratic norms cannot be reduced to other factors that plausibly influence policy implementation, including social structure and caste norms, political party system, and political culture more broadly. I consider potential avenues for future research on the evolution of bureaucratic norms in light of field-based evidence, in particular the historical trajectory of state development and the role of political leadership. Next, I go on to discuss the larger theoretical contribution of the argument. I connect the dissertation's central findings to other empirical cases outside my original sample and in other policy domains.

While a significant line of research emphasizes the formal design of institutions, agencies of the state are no less beholden to informal, unwritten rules that shape how public officials behave and relate to citizens and civic agencies outside the state. These findings compel us to go beyond the *de jure* rules of the game and consider how their *de facto* interpretation and enactment by public officials (and citizens) shapes the quality of governance. In that regard, more scholarly attention

should be placed on the qualitative features of public institutions, the organizational norms and practices that sustain them, and the mechanisms by which they facilitate or impede civic participation. For policy, the findings suggest that formal administrative structures within the state should not occupy the entire focus of institutional reform efforts in developing democracies. As recent waves of decentralization and local planning have shown, even well-designed attempts to improve accountability do not always lead to better governance outcomes, particularly for the poor. Rather, a closer understanding of the informal norms and practices within the state opens the possibility for more nuanced interventions that can improve the responsiveness of public institutions to the needs of marginalized citizens.

Chapter 1 – Appendix

Policy Implementation Indicators (Tables 1.1.1 – 1.1.6)

Table 1.1.1 School Facilities and Physical Inputs
(% of schools that have the following)

State	At least one classroom per teacher	Office / Storage space	Boundary Wall	Drinking water facility	Toilets	Kitchen shed
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	76.7	75.5	37.3	87.5	89.2	82.0
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	81.6	87.9	67.0	77.9	94.2	96.3
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	87.4	88.6	44.4	93.1	93.3	89.3
<i>All India</i>	75.6	74.5	52.2	82.6	89.9	81.3

Source: ASER Report (2011).

Table 1.1.2 Provision of Midday Meal

	Midday Meal Served on day of school visit (%)
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	98.0
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	95.1
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	71.2
<i>All India</i>	83.4

Source: ASER Report (2011).

Table 1.1.3 Teacher Absence Rate

State	Teacher Absence (%)
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	21.2
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	32.8
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	26.3
<i>Weighted Average</i>	24.8

Source: Kremer et al. (2005)

Table 1.1.4 Single-Teacher Primary Schools

	% Primary schools	% Students enrolled
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	7.9	4.6
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	19.5	10.6
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	3.0	2.3
<i>All India</i>	11.8	6.1

Source: ASER Report (2011).

Table 1.1.5 Library and Teaching-Learning Materials

	Library Books Available (% schools)	Teaching-Learning Materials Available
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	80.3	91.5
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	48.6	82.4
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	47.7	73.5
<i>All India</i>	63.1	80.4

Source: ASER Report (2011).

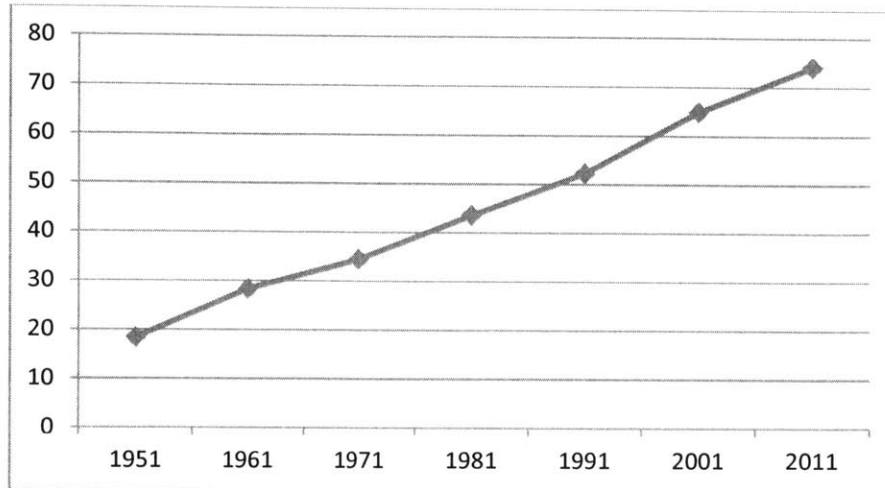
Table 1.1.6 Student Dropout Rate
(% students in grades 1-5)

	Boys	Girls	All
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	2.6	2.7	2.6
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	7.4	6.3	6.9
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	17.4	15.0	16.2
<i>All India</i>	10.15	9.75	9.95

Source: Mehta (2011)

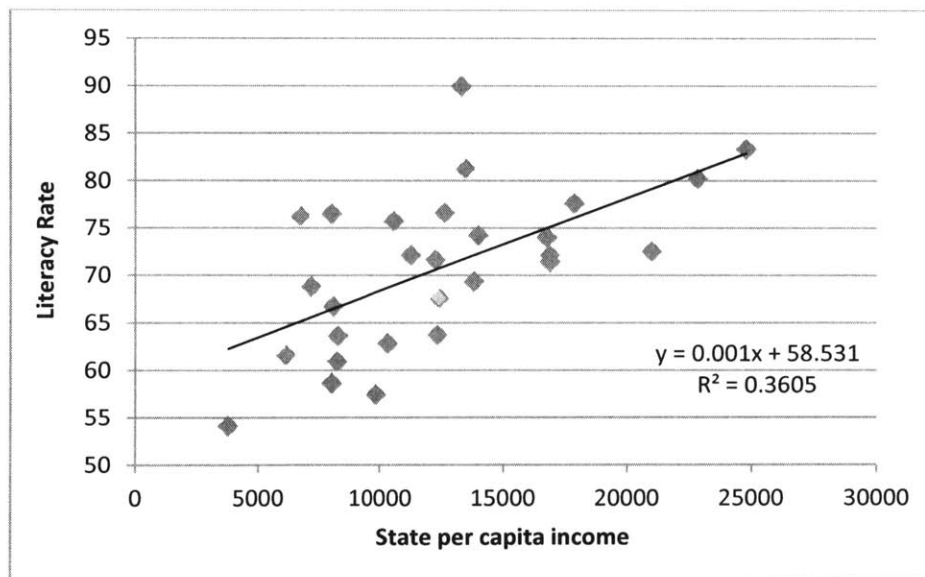
Figure 1.2.1. - 1.2.2. Literacy in India – Trends and Subnational Variation

Figure 1.2.1 Growth in India's Literacy Rate



Source: Census of India, multiple years.

Figure 1.2.2 Relationship between Literacy and Economic Development in Indian States



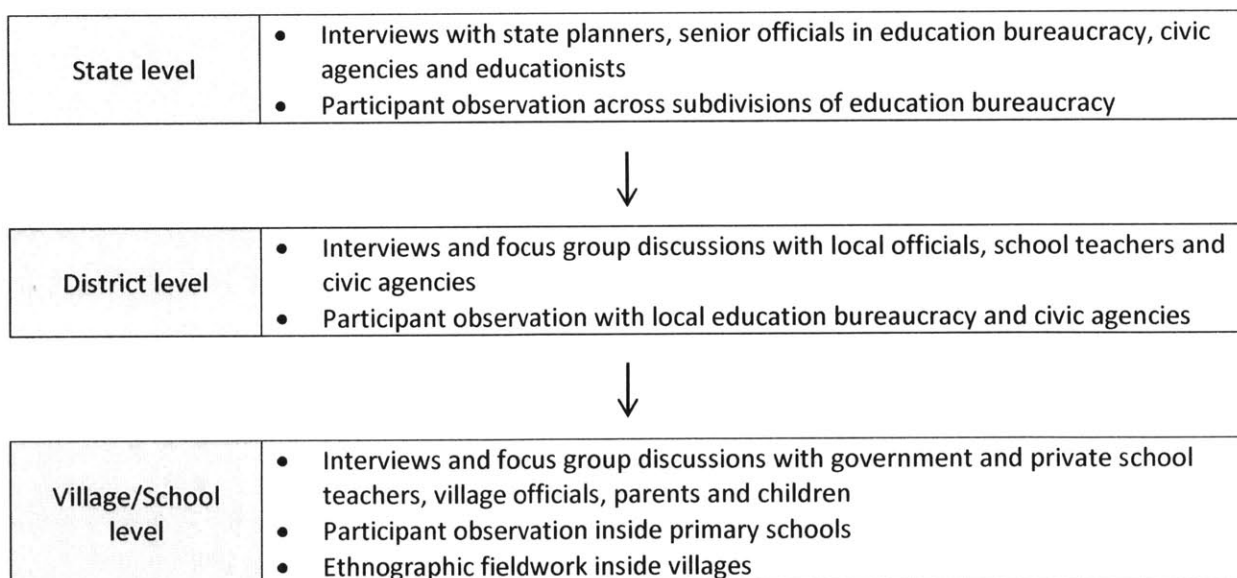
Source: Literacy Rate: National Family Health Survey 3 (2007).

State per capita income (Rupees at 1993 prices): India Economic Survey (2004-05).

Figure 1.3.1 Profile of Case Study States and Administrative Districts

State	District	Explanatory Factors					
		Geography	Income Level	Poverty Rate	Caste Structure	Political Party System	Legacy of landlordism (zamindari)
Himachal Pradesh	Shimla	Hills	High-medium	Low	Mainly upper caste	Two party (national)	No
Uttarakhand	Almora	Hills	Medium	Low	Mainly upper caste	Two party (national)	No
Uttar Pradesh	Saharanpur	Plains	Medium	High	Mixed caste	Multi-party (ethnic, regional)	Yes
	Sitapur	Plains	Low	High	Mixed caste	Multi-party (ethnic, regional)	Yes

Figure 1.3.2 Multi-Level Research Methodology



Chapter 2. State, Civil Society and Primary Education in India

*When it comes to the legal and constitutional framework for child rights, India is well ahead... There is no lack of laws and policies. The problem we face is in administering those policies on the ground.*³⁵

2.1. Introduction

Primary education in India today is the joint product of initiatives by India's central government, states and local communities. Within a broad national policy framework, Indian states wield great authority over the implementation process. This chapter helps set the stage for the subnational comparative analysis of policy implementation across Indian states.

I begin in Section 2.2 with a brief account of the history of India's universal primary education policies. I discuss the policy framework in India, which provides state governments with increasing authority over policy implementation. The focus is not so much to explain the politics behind the central government's policy actions and omissions, but rather to situate the subnational variation across India within the broader narrative of education in India. I also detail the historical financing and current policy framework of primary education in India. Notwithstanding a common policy framework and administrative system, I show that some parts of India perform significantly better than others within the domain of primary education, which forms the empirical puzzle of the dissertation.

Section 2.3 discusses the administrative structure of India's education system, as well as key actors, including the bureaucracy, school teachers and civic agencies. I describe certain critical features of the Indian bureaucracy, some of which (e.g. civil service protection) appear Weberian while others (e.g. bureaucratic transfers) do not. I show that formal structures and procedures within the education bureaucracy are very similar across Indian states, making the study of bureaucratic norms all the more compelling. I then discuss a critical hurdle that agencies face in implementing primary education policy, namely, the reality of deeply entrenched social inequalities in rural India. However, the nature of inequalities and how it is experienced by communities and inside classrooms varies significantly across rural India. I argue for a contextualized approach to analyzing policy implementation, one that accounts for the diverse meanings and practices, for they structure the very nature of the "problem" that public agencies must set out to "solve." I conclude in Section 2.4, shifting our focus to the subnational level, where public agencies face the concrete problems of implementation.

2.2 Universal Primary Education Policy

2.2.1. Historical Context

Soon after independence, India's state planners took on the formidable task of educating a large, poor and overwhelmingly illiterate population. As article 45 of India's Constitution proclaimed, "[t]he State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of the

³⁵ Quote from senior public official presenting India's policy framework on child rights to the 2006 cohort of research interns at UNICEF India headquarters, New Delhi.

Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.” They had their work cut out for them. Educational neglect under British rule left the vast majority of Indians outside the school system. The first Census of India, taken in 1901, reported a literacy rate of 5 percent, which barely rose to 10 percent by the time of the 1941 Census. Although the Hunter Commission of 1882 recommended mass education in India, little investment was made by the British Raj to extend education to the masses, and the first official census taken after India’s independence saw literacy at a measly 18 percent.

Yet the British legacy for India’s education system went beyond neglect. The purpose behind the colonial government’s education policy was to groom a cadre of Anglicized elites to help administer the country on the crown’s behalf.³⁶ While these policies allowed for the spread of the English language among Indian elites, they had the consequence of segmenting the education system into those who received an “English-medium” education (the ruled) and those who did not (the ruled).³⁷ The segmentation of India’s education system was superimposed on what was already an extremely hierarchical and oppressive social system, one that excluded lower castes, women and other marginalized groups from obtaining an education.

The caste system traditionally barred lower caste groups from setting foot in schools, and well after the formal bars were lifted, casteism continued to obstruct their participation. Girls also faced educational discrimination under patriarchy and restrictive gender norms, which limited the physical mobility of women outside the home (*purdah*) and placed the economic burden of paying a marriage dowry (*dahej*) on the daughter’s family. These barriers were reflected in the gender gap in literacy as well as the literacy gap between the general population and Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Although they are increasingly narrowing, these gaps have persisted in the decades after independence (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2 in chapter Appendix).

If implementing primary education in India was daunting, national leadership could not have been accused of showing an excess of activism. Indeed, the history of primary education policy in post-independence India reveals a pattern of inconsistency between official rhetoric and tangible policy measures.³⁸ The Congress Party, which ruled India for first three decades after independence, was in the habit of announcing ambitious targets for school enrollment that it routinely failed to meet. Notwithstanding the constitutional goal for achieving universal primary education by 1960, financing for primary education in the early 1950s was below 1 percent of GDP (see Figure 2.2 in chapter Appendix).

To address the policy deficiencies in the education system, a national commission on education was set up in 1964-66. Known popularly as the Kothari Commission, it was the first time that policymakers drew an explicit connection between investment in education and India’s social and economic development (Tilak 2007). The commission’s emphasis on the expansion of educational financing was seen by many observers as a turning point in India’s education policy.³⁹

³⁶ As Lord Macaulay wrote in 1835 in his *Minute on Indian Education* British education policy aimed to develop a class of Indians trained in English, who could “*be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern.*”

³⁷ For a discussion of British ideology attitudes towards Indian education and intellectual traditions more generally, see Sen (1997) and Fischer-Tiné and Mann (2004).

³⁸ On the gap between official rhetoric and the reality of India’s education system, see Myron Weiner’s (1991) landmark study of child labor and education in India.

³⁹ As the Kothari Commission declared: “[W]e should strive to allocate the largest proportion of GNP possible to educational development” (Education Commission 1966:889).

Yet the express intentions of policymakers in New Delhi continued to depart from reality. A full decade after the Kothari Commission made its recommendation to increase education financing to 6 percent of GDP, India's education budget continued to hover around an abysmal 2 percent of GDP. For a summary of central government policies in primary education see Tables 2.1-2.2 in chapter Appendix.

The tides began to change in the mid-1970s, as India's central government began taking a more active role in education policy. India's federal structure gives state governments the primary authority over development policies, particularly in sectors like education and health. Although states had full authority over education in the past, in light of the country's poor aggregate performance and growing regional disparities, India's central government took joint responsibility for education policy alongside the states, placing it on the Concurrent list of subjects in 1976. With newfound influence over education, the central government began investing more heavily in primary education. By the mid-1980s, India's education budget increased by a significant margin to more than 3.5 percent of GDP (see Figure 2.3 in chapter Appendix).

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, India's Congress party pushed for further educational reforms in the 1980s. Ambitious targets for universal primary schooling were set once again with passage of the 1986 New Policy on Education. However, this time the central government not only increased the financing for primary education, but developed specific policy requirements, including free and compulsory education and a more decentralized administration. Targeted programs like the Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya System, a tuition-free, residential school system for rural children grades 6-12 was administered by the central government. A related policy known as Operation Blackboard was enacted a year later for school at the primary level. It provided basic school facilities, instructional materials for teachers, and provided states with financing for additional school teachers.

Notwithstanding the spurt in policy activism by the central government during the 1970s and 1980s, domestic criticism had mounted over India's education budgets. Compared to other countries at similar levels of development, the Indian state was investing more heavily in tertiary education and elite institutions, to the relative neglect of primary education. India's Third Five-Year plan saw 15 percent of the education budget allocated to the tertiary level, a proportion that increased to 25 percent in the Fourth plan and hovered at 22 percent in the Fifth plan. The share allocated to primary education, meanwhile, remained at 30 percent of the total budget (Tilak 2007).⁴⁰

2.2.2. Economic Liberalization and Education Reform

India's fiscal condition deteriorated significantly over the 1980s, as the country external debt ballooned to \$70 billion. A balance of payments crisis in 1991 led to the adoption fiscal discipline and structural adjustment reforms. IMF-supported economic stabilization also led significantly curtailed spending in the social sector. At the same time, however, the Congress Party government led by Prime Minister P.V. Narsimha Rao adopted major economic reforms that would help set India's future growth trajectory. Under the guidance of Dr. Manmohan Singh, erstwhile Finance

⁴⁰ India's development planning is based on a five-year planning model that is administered by the Planning Commission of the Central government.

Minister, the Indian state liberalized several key sectors of the economy, introduced market reforms and undid much of the restrictive License Raj. The same decade witnessed India finally break past the sluggish “Hindu rate of growth” to achieve an admirable income growth rate of 6.5 percent (Ahluwalia 2002).⁴¹

The 1990s also ushered in major international commitments on the part of India’s central government to primary education. UNESCO’s 1991 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand marked a turning point in the global movement for universal primary education. India was among the developing country signatories at the conference that expressed a commitment to “Education for All” by the year 2000. The same decade also witnessed a surge in foreign aid and technical assistance within India’s education sector. World Bank support for primary education grew significantly of a “social safety net” provided in light of structural adjustment reforms (Kumar, Priyam et al. 2001).⁴² World Bank investment came under the District Primary Education Program (DPEP). DPEP was a technical assistance program targeting underperforming districts, while at the same time decentralizing the planning and administration of primary schooling. The program began in 1994 in 42 districts and eventually spread to cover close to 60 percent of the country.

With a fast-growing economy and generous external assistance, India’s education budget in the 1990s stood consistently at 4 percent of GDP. Though still far below the 6 percent recommended by the 1964 Kothari Commission, investment in primary education had reached a steady rise, and primary school enrollments began to surge. Whereas in 1992, close to one half of rural girls and one third of rural boys ages 6-14 were not attending school, by the end of the decade non-attendance had declined to 30 percent and 19 percent, respectively. As Table 2.3 in the chapter Appendix shows, the gender gap in school completion had also narrowed significantly. Still, even as late as 2001, more than a third of primary school-aged children in India were out of school.

2.2.3. Education for All: Current Policy Framework

More than fifty years after independence, universal primary education remained a distant goal for India. And yet the last decade has witnessed a sea change in terms of primary school access and enrollment. Starting in the 1990s, primary education received a major boost from India’s central government through several new policies. India’s central government launched its flagship universal primary education program in 2001, this time under the BJP-led government of Prime Minister Atul Bihari Vajpayee. Like its Congress Party predecessors, the BJP government displayed continuing commitment to economic liberalization, opening India’s economy to foreign direct investment, while at the same time expanding the central government’s role over the education sector. Along with SSA, the National Program for Nutrition Support to Primary Education was launched in 2002. The Midday Meal Program, as it is more commonly known provides a free, hot lunch daily to

⁴¹ From 1950-1980, India’s famous “Hindu rate of growth” was 3.5 percent per annum, as compared with 4.9 percent among other developing countries and 4.1 percent for the entire world economy (Herring 1999). While many observers have credited India’s subsequent stellar growth rate to the 1991 reforms, a growing body of research finds that the growth acceleration was already underway in the 1980s, when India’s central government under the Congress Party began to shift its policy stance in favor of private business (Rodrik and Subramanian 2004; Kohli 2006).

⁴² World Bank spending on education in India began in the 1980s at a negligible amount and grew to \$2 billion by 2000. The DPEP program was initiated in a few select states under different names, starting with the Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Program (UPBEP) in 1993.

students attending government primary and middle schools. The policy aims to improve school enrollment rates as well as mitigate high malnutrition rates among children.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan⁴³ (SSA) consists of a variety of policy interventions to improve school access, the retention of students, and the quality of education for children ages 6-14. Since the start of SSA, India has witnessed tremendous growth in the primary education sector. Whereas in the 1980s about half of the child population (6-14 years) was out of school, according to the latest estimates, primary school enrollment has crossed 95 percent (ASER 2012). This expansion can be attributed largely to massive infrastructure expansion financed by the central government. Whereas in the 1980s, close to 90 percent of education spending was borne by state governments, that proportion decreased to 85 percent in the 1990s, and then again declined further to 75 percent over the last decade (see Figure 2.4 in chapter Appendix).

Though the financial burden for primary education still rests primarily with state governments, the educational expansion over the last fifteen years or so has been born largely by the central government.⁴⁴ The central government has borne the majority of capital costs for school expansion, which include infrastructure, incentives and other policy inputs. Along with major infrastructure expansion, SSA provides a mix of incentives—scholarships conditional on enrollment, free textbooks, uniforms and schoolbags—to attract and retain children from disadvantaged communities. In addition, SSA targets girls' education through programs like Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), residential schools for girls who have dropped out after completing fifth grade. In addition, the central government has helped finance teacher training centers, known as DIETs—District Institutes for Educational Training—in every administrative district across the country. A detailed summary of the components of SSA are provided in Table 2.2 in the chapter Appendix.

As societal momentum behind universal primary education grew in India, the Central government most recently enacted a law recognizing education as a fundamental right. The Right to Education (RTE) Act, which was passed by Parliament on August 4, 2009, guarantees free and compulsory education for all children in the age group 6-14. Beyond its symbolic importance, the act fixes a judicial responsibility on the state to provide education and is enforceable by law.

The discussion of India's universal primary education policy helps set the context for the study of subnational variation. Policies like SSA, the Midday Meal Program all involve a series of attempts by India's central government to universalize primary education, equalize investment across states and improve service delivery and accountability. Notwithstanding the same national education policies, formal democratic institutions, and, as we shall see below, similar administrative structures, implementation outcomes vary dramatically across India. Figure 2.5 in the chapter Appendix offers a visual representation of that subnational variation based on one very important metric, primary school attendance rates. Although I examine other outcomes for policy implement in the chapters to follow, the variation in student attendance offers a glimpse of just how diverse the performance is across Indian states. South Indian states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu have effectively achieved goals of universal access to education, ensuring that approximately 95 percent of students

⁴³ *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* in Hindi for the "Education for All Campaign."

⁴⁴ The major cost for education in India consists of recurring teacher salaries, which is borne by states. The salary of teachers is set at the national level through a National Pay Commission. While states have room for adjustment, most follow the nationally recommended salary range.

attend school daily. Meanwhile, in the Hindi belt region of north India, close to a third of children ages 6-14 are not attending school.⁴⁵ At the same time, we observe significant variation even within north India, which motivates the selection of cases, as discussed in Chapter 1.

As a final point, it is important to bear in mind that, while Indian states exhibit significant variation in outcomes for the implementation of primary schooling, India as a whole continues to underperform in relation to other developing countries against which it is often compared. Literacy rates in India, while no doubt improving, are still far behind in comparison to other BRIC countries and are much close to those in sub-Saharan Africa (see Table 2.4 in the chapter Appendix). Placing India within a global context reminds us of the fact that the insights put forward in this dissertation are drawn from an educational environment that remains highly underdeveloped. That is not to say that the insights could not transfer over to the context of other, more educationally developed countries. The point, rather, is to be explicit about where India falls in the universe of cases, with an eye towards developing a more nuanced, comparative perspective on policy implementation.

2.3. The Primary Education System

2.3.1 Formal Administrative Structure

The administrative structure for primary education reflects a governance paradox facing India's central government: how to decentralize authority down to the local level while at the same time ensuring upward accountability? India's federal democracy is organized into three tiers of elected government, which include the central (or union) government, state (or provincial) government and the local village council (*gram panchayat*). The electoral decline of the Congress Party and the rise of regional parties and coalition governments at the national level contributed to the steady erosion of authority within India's central government and greater assertion of power by state governments (Yadav 1999; Frankel 2005; Ziegfeld 2012). As the locus of power has shifted away from the center towards states, power below the federal level has also become increasingly concentrated in the hands of state governments. Critical functions of the state, such law and order, economic development and social policy fall under the control of state governments (Kohli 1990; Sinha 2005).⁴⁶ The implementation of universal primary education policy is among those critical functions.

State governments implement universal primary education policy their own bureaucracies. Indian states have more or less identical administrative structures, functions and administrative resources available for primary education. Similar to India's governmental setup, the structure of the Indian state also follows a three-tier hierarchy, with a central administration in New Delhi, state-level administration based in each state capital, and local district administration. For a diagram of the formal structure of the primary education system, see Figure 2.6 in the chapter Appendix.

⁴⁵ The data on this map are taken from India's National Family Health Survey 3 (2008-9), considered one of the most accurate and reliable social surveys in India.

⁴⁶ Kapur and Mukhopadhyay (2007) argue that the concentration of authority at the state level is due to regional parties having strong electoral incentives to control public resources at the local level. So long as electoral success depends on the ability of politicians to dispense patronage, the same argument can obtain for national parties as well.

The Principal Secretary of Education sits at the top of the bureaucratic hierarchy within each state. This individual is invariably an officer from the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), India's elite civil service. Both of these individuals report directly to India's central government, in particular the Ministry for Human Resource Development (MHRD), which oversees all education. Below the Secretary of Education are subdivision heads in charge of various functions. These include the State Project Director for SSA, who oversees the central government's SSA program, the Directorate, which oversees routine operations such as teacher salaries, and then more specific functions like the Midday Meal Program.

The state-level bureaucracy implements policies at the local level primarily through district administration. The district official in charge of education oversees the lower units, which include the administrative block, cluster and finally, the Village Education Committee (VEC). Teacher training institutes, known as DIETs, are located within each district and carry the same formal structure across Indian states. Finally, funds for SSA get disbursed to each district via the state government, and bureaucratic oversight is conducted by the Secretary of Education.

Although *de facto* authority over implementation resides with state bureaucracies, decentralization in India was intended to go down much further. The passage of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to India's Constitution called for the devolution of functions, administrative authority and resources to locally elected village councils, known as the Panchayati Raj Institutions. With some notable exceptions such as Kerala, most state governments in India have been slow to decentralize and part with their authority (Heller 2000). Panchayats have made little headway in policy areas like education, which continue to remain highly centralized (Pritchett and Pande 2006). In the context of Hindi-belt states like Uttar Pradesh, even the implementation of village elections has been deeply problematic, leading to calls for even greater administrative oversight (Dutta 2012).

With calls to decentralize public service delivery and enhance community governance, SSA also sought to encourage local community participation by working through panchayati raj institutions and Village Education Committees (VECs). Comprised of parents and teachers and led by the village council head (*gram pradhan*), VECs command funds and authority over school infrastructure, the MDM program, and hiring of para-teachers.⁴⁷ Notwithstanding these attempts at decentralization, across most states, SSA is effectively managed by the state and district offices.

To strengthen local administrative capacity, India's universal primary education program provides for local district teams. The SSA program in particular decentralized governance to the local district level and invested in expanding the size and skill mix of local district administration. Modeled after the World Bank's DPEP program, which was implemented in select regions of rural India and Bangladesh in the 1990s, SSA created a District Project Office within each district to implement a variety of program components, such as infrastructure planning, community participation and gender needs.

2.3.2 The Education Bureaucracy

⁴⁷ Studies of VECs in Uttar Pradesh find these agencies either defunct or ineffective

In addition to the formal structure described above, there are other features to India's bureaucracy that make it compelling to study, particularly through subnational comparative methods. Bureaucratic line departments like Department of Education have virtually identical procedures for recruitment and training, incentives for promotion, and terms of service across Indian states. Some these features of the Indian bureaucracy, such as meritocratic recruitment procedures and civil service protection, have been understood by some scholars to approximate the ideal of Weberian autonomy and professionalism (Evans 1995; Herring 1999). Importantly, India's politicians are constitutionally constrained from hiring or firing bureaucrats.

There are good reasons to doubt that the Indian state actually approximates the Weberian ideal. Although bureaucrats in India enjoy security of tenure and cannot be terminated based on the whims of individual politicians, alternative means of political control over the bureaucracy have emerged. The most visible among these is the rise of what Iyer and Mani (2009) refer to as the "Transfer Raj," a system in which politicians use frequent (threats of) reassignment across posts of varying importance to and prestige to exert control over bureaucrats. Faced with the risk of being reassigned to less prestigious positions, or even worse, undesirable geographic locations (known popularly within the bureaucracy as "punishment postings," bureaucrats may seek to develop ties with politicians to ensure the security of their posts.

These problems of transfer notwithstanding, the Indian state does possess a degree of procedural integrity. What matters for the purposes of our analysis here, moreover, is that bureaucratic procedures are *consistent* across Indian states. Senior levels of the education bureaucracy, which include posts like the Secretary of Education and State Project Director for SSA, are drawn from the IAS, which is both nationally-recruited and trained. Modeled after the Indian Civil Service (ICS), which was established by the British to administer over India, IAS officers are career civil servants that must remain politically non-aligned. They cannot join political parties or campaign. Selection to the service is based on an incredibly selection national examination that is administered by an independent commission, or else through promotion from the state civil services, which operate as state-level versions of the IAS. Once selected for the IAS, officers are assigned to work in particular states, and it is in those states that they spend the majority of their careers. Barring a few exceptions, such as married couples in the IAS, officers cannot choose which states they are assigned to, which helps to mitigate the concern that some states may be able to attract higher-skilled or more motivated officers.

The procedural consistency across Indian states makes it possible to compare them. Even the informal system of transfer and reassignment, which is the primary basis through which politicians are thought to exert influence over bureaucrats, applies only to position *within* the particular state that an IAS officer was originally assigned. Below the IAS, each state in India has its own state civil service, which operates according to similar procedures. Highly competitive examinations, this time carried out by a Public Service Commission within each state, rather than nationally, form the basis for selection into the state civil service. Like the IAS, the state civil service officers do not move across Indian states. That ensures that officers do not move across Indian states, creating the formal conditions to allow *informal* bureaucratic norms to evolve differently across different states.

To help anchor this discussion empirically, consider the comparison across the states selected for this study: Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. Table 2.5 in the chapter Appendix summarizes the key features of the primary education bureaucracy across these three states. The table lists the key features of bureaucracy that scholars associate with Weberian-ness,

which obtain evenly across all three states. These formal features of the bureaucracy cannot form the basis for any differences observed within the state.

Also included in the table is evidence of the politicization of the education bureaucracies across these three states, namely the frequency of reassignments that took place in the two most important posts within the education bureaucracy over the course of fieldwork conducted for this study. From 2008-10, the Education Secretary of Uttar Pradesh change four times, as did the State Project Director of SSA in Himachal Pradesh. Needless to say, such frequent turnover of top leadership weighs heavily on bureaucratic organizations. As many officers explained during interviews, the frequency of transfer can be disruptive. It takes time to get acquainted with the demands of a post and establish relations with fellow colleagues and subordinates. The insecurity of one's position also makes it difficult to develop domain expertise, and as Iyer and Mani (2009) show, may even incentivize bureaucrats not to invest in skill development.

As a final point of comparison, Table 2.6 presents data on the administrative capacity of the education bureaucracies in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. These two states of similar size and geographic area have broadly similar human resources for delivering primary education. Not included in the table but again very similar are the physical resources within their respective offices, including computers to assemble information from school inspections and develop reports and other official documents for dissemination to stakeholders. Importantly, the administrative resources for implementing SSA are provided directly by India's central government.

2.3.3 Primary School Teachers

A discussion of India's primary education system would be incomplete without paying due attention to school teachers. With one in four school teachers found absent on a given day in government primary schools, the dysfunction of India's primary education system has been largely attributed to poor teacher accountability (Kremer, Muralidharan et al. 2005).⁴⁸ While there are likely many causes behind poor teacher accountability in India, low pay is not among them. By both domestic and international standards, government school teachers in India are paid handsomely, and the overwhelming proportion of India's education budget consists of payment of teacher salaries.⁴⁹ While the variation in the rate of teacher absence across Indian states is quite significant, it is also worth pointing out that educationally advanced states like Kerala and Himachal Pradesh appear to perform only marginally better than average, which suggest that accountability problems are systematic across India.

The influence of school teachers over education policy and administration in India has also been well-documented (Kingdon and Muzammil 2003).⁵⁰ Primary school teachers constitute the largest group of government employees in India. Their sheer numbers, geographical reach and influence at the local level make them prime agents for political campaigning. Although campaigning

⁴⁸ As Kremer et al (2005) report in their comprehensive survey of teacher absence in India, of the remaining teachers who were present in school, only 45 % were found to be actively engaged in teaching.

⁴⁹ Based on my own fieldwork conducted across three north Indian states, I found that government school teachers can earn anywhere from 2-10 times the salary of their counterparts working in private schools.

⁵⁰ The Constitution of India also makes a special provision granting school teachers at the secondary level representation in the upper house of state legislatures, a political status that no other government employees enjoy.

by government employees is officially illegal, the influence of school teachers over elections is widely acknowledged. Apart from (illegal) campaigning, school teachers are charged with manning election booths during Parliamentary and state assembly elections, which confers another source of political influence (Beteille 2009).

Yet there is another side to the low levels of teacher motivation that has received less attention from academics. Government primary school teachers face an uphill teaching environment, with multi-grade classroom settings, an abundance of non-teaching duties, little administrative support or oversight, irrelevant forms of training, and alienation from the education bureaucracy, and the like.⁵¹ The inflexible and overambitious primary school curriculum written by administrators in New Delhi and state capitals appears to correspond little to the realities facing children in rural India (Pritchett and Beatty 2012). On top of all this, the social distance between school teachers and the children in government primary schools is large and appears only to be widening as poor and traditionally marginalized groups enter the school system. For all of these reasons, primary school teachers across India are demotivated and disheartened, even in educationally advanced states (Ramachandran 2005).

2.3.4. *Civil Society*

Before we can set out to analyze India's education system, we must also take account of the societal organizations and communities upon which primary education is embedded in rural India. Indian civil society has played a significant role in the country's educational development. I take civil society here to include not only formal organization recognized by the state, but also informal associations, religious institutions and community groups organized around education. India has had a vibrant history of religious voluntarism, especially in fields like education and medicine. Secular service organizations based on Gandhian voluntarism grew in the post-independence era and were precursors to the modern NGO, which is now a widespread form of organization across India. However, their relationship to the state has often been characterized by antagonism (Sen 1999).

India's central government has actively partnered with civil society groups in the education sector. The 1987 National Literacy Mission of 1987, a central government policy to develop adult literacy, helped spawn a number of associations to help deploy literacy camps across the country. External agencies working with India's central government have also actively promoted civil society partnerships. The World Bank DPEP program, for example, aimed to work with local communities and NGOs as part of the effort to decentralize education planning. State-led efforts to work with civil society effectively have, in some ways, the boundaries between the state and NGOs.⁵²

State governments also developed ties with civil society groups. However, the nature of state-civil society relations varies significantly across states, a fact that further prompts the subnational comparative analysis. Some Indian states have led the development of civic agencies

⁵¹ Interviews and Focus Group Discussions with 150 primary school teachers.

⁵² As Jenkins (2010) notes, organizations like Kerala's KSSP became closely tied with the Communist Party. He also draws important parallels between the rise of young NGO fieldworkers in education and related sectors, and what Krishna (2003) has described as "*naya neta*," new politicians that help broker relations between communities and local public agencies.

within education, such as the policy Mother-Teacher Associations in Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan's Lok Jumbish program, which engaged in community-level micro-planning, and Kerala's Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), which worked on local capacity building of panchayats.⁵³ Others have effectively blocked civic groups from working with local public agencies, as in the case of Uttar Pradesh.

According to the Indian government's most recent policy framework under *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, local public agencies are encouraged to work with civic partners in a variety of areas. For example, states are encouraged to work with NGOs to manage residential schools for disadvantaged girls. NGOs are also featured in the policy for "bridge courses," which are programs for helping out-of-school children catch up and get mainstreamed into the primary school system. Women's organizations, such as Self Help Groups (SHGs) are identified in the SSA policy framework as critical partners for assisting in areas like the Midday Meal Program.

Perhaps the most far-reaching push for civic participation comes from the administrative framework for SSA, which outlines the roles, responsibilities and statutory powers of Village Education Committees (VECs). VECs were explicitly adopted under SSA to help manage schools, make key decisions around infrastructure, and in some cases, even hire additional teachers. VECs are also closely tied to the Panchayati Raj System, as the gram pradhan is made an official member on the VEC. Although a standard organizational blueprint for VECs has been adopted across the country, the substantive participation is likely to vary considerably based on, *inter alia*, the extent to which public agencies engage in the capacity building of VECs.⁵⁴ The variable quality of VECs across Indian states point to yet another reason for subnational comparative analysis.

2.4. Social Inequality

India's education policies make explicit reference to "community participation." However, the sociocultural composition and dynamics of community vary tremendously across Indian states and localities. These dynamics are tied to a legacy of entrenched social inequality. Within that context, education is considered the great equalizer. It is a means for the marginalized to participate in a modern economy and achieve social mobility. Yet one need not travel to rural India to recognize that education systems also reproduce inequality (Coleman 1968; Bourdieu 1984). As one moves beyond the enactment of policies to problems of implementation, one must contend with the meanings and social practices associated with educational institutions. In the context of education in rural India, that requires one to grapple with the meanings and practices associated with caste. Here I discuss briefly the nature of caste inequality in India's education system, and their implications for policy implementation.

Caste divisions in India correspond broadly to the *varna* system of social classes in Hinduism, which includes Brahmins (priest/scholar), Kshatriya (warrior/ruler), Vaisya (merchant) and Shudra

⁵³ On the varied experience of community participation in primary education across Indian states, see Govinda and Diwan (2002).

⁵⁴ In some states, such as Uttar Pradesh, VECs have found to be largely defunct, even after conducting capacity building exercises, which suggests that other features of the local institutional environment may hinder their effective participation (Banerjee, Banerji et al. 2008).

(peasant, laborer and servant). The first three are referred to as upper castes, while Shudras are considered to be lower, or backward castes.⁵⁵ Beneath the backward castes are Dalits, former untouchables of the caste system, who technically have no caste (*avarna*) and are therefore not included in the *varna* system. The term Dalit, which means “oppressed” (literally “broken to pieces” in Sanskrit), was adopted in protest of the injustice experienced by Dalits at the hands of upper castes.⁵⁶

While there exist literally hundreds of castes and sub-castes (*jati*) within each of these broad categories, for policy and administrative purposes, the Indian state collapses these distinctions. The Indian state places all upper castes into one “General” (*samanya*) category. Lower caste groups, meanwhile, are classified into two categories. Dalits fall in the Scheduled Caste (SC) category, while backward castes fall in the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category. Finally, along with lower castes, the Indian state classifies tribals (*adivasis*) into a single Scheduled Tribe (ST) category. Although the Indian constitution outlaws untouchability and legal provision are in place to protect SCs and STs, these groups continue to endure social discrimination, economic marginalization and atrocities at the hands of upper castes (Borooah 2005). There is evidence, however, that education policies are reaching Dalits and producing changes in terms of greater social mobility and economic participation.⁵⁷

Much existing scholarship in the political economy of development has taken note of the caste divisions across India, and their ramifications for the distribution of public goods and services (Betancourt and Gleason 2000; Banerjee, Iyer et al. 2005). Some of this work draws explicitly on the economic literature on ethnic diversity and public goods provision (Alesina, Baqir et al. 1999; Miguel and Gugerty 2005; Banerjee and Somanathan 2007). The many contributions of this research notwithstanding, however, it has tended to overlook the varied social *meanings* and *practices* attached to caste, and what ramifications these have for how public goods and services are used and experienced by their beneficiaries.⁵⁸

The problem of meaning and practice gets magnified for social policies like education, where processes of social discrimination, both overt and subtle, can have significant ramifications for the education process. For example, these caste categories that outlined above are officially sanctioned and reproduced on a daily basis inside government primary schools. Caste identity forms the basis upon which children qualify for certain incentives under SSA, such as free uniforms and scholarships conditional on student enrollment. These categories also form the basis for continued stigma and discrimination within the education system (Nambissan 1996).

⁵⁵ According to the Vedic social order, these four *varna* are said to have come, respectively, from the mouth, arms, thighs and feet of the creator. The former Untouchables have no place in the social order (Srinivas 1962).

⁵⁶ Dalit has increasingly come to replace Harijan (or “children of God” in Hindi), the name given to the former untouchables by Mahatma Gandhi, particularly among intellectuals, official circles and contemporary scholarship. That said, few Dalits I met during fieldwork across rural north India used the term Dalit to refer to themselves or others from their community. Many used the term Harijan, though most often they would go by their particular *jati* (e.g. Chamar, Pasi, etc.).

⁵⁷ Dalits and tribals are among the most vulnerable and socioeconomically marginalized populations in India. I focus here on Dalits because they form a much larger population within the states I examine.

⁵⁸ As Singh (2011) is correct to point out, the economic approach to this work has also produced a tendency to “read off” the politics of identity from objective population counts, ignoring the subjective sense of belonging to a particular group, which can also have ramifications for public goods provision. To that I would add the further point that even the “objectivity” of population counts can be called to question. On the political construction of population counts, see Nobles (2000).

Processes of caste exclusion and discrimination vary across India, with important ramifications for the delivery of educational services.⁵⁹ To help situate the empirical setting of this dissertation, I contextualize the comparison between the plains regions of Uttar Pradesh and the Himalayan region, which includes Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.⁶⁰ A typical village in UP is segregated into multiple hamlets and smaller habitations based on caste and *jati*, and it is not uncommon to find schools within the same village segregated along caste lines (De, Khera et al. 2011). Casteist practices can obtain inside of schools as well. Take as another example, the provision of the Midday Meal program. In schools across rural Uttar Pradesh, it is still common to find children of different caste groups, even lower caste groups, segregated from each other during lunchtime.⁶¹ What this implies for policy implementation is that public agencies in Uttar Pradesh are faced with problems of spatial discrimination and caste conflict around provision of the Midday Meal.

The same kinds of meanings and practices, however, do not obtain in the Himalayan region. There, rituals of caste purity and pollution are somewhat attenuated by the distinct forms of Hinduism. That is not to say that casteism does not obtain in the hills.⁶² Villages in the hill region tend to be far more spatially segregated along caste lines, owing in part to very different agricultural economies. Moreover, the dominance of the two main upper caste groups—Brahmin and Kshatriya—within the hills affects the landscape significantly for policy implementation. Public agencies that aim to redress uneven access in the education system must find ways of targeting spatially segregated, minority villages comprised of lower caste groups. This contrasts significantly from the spatial distribution of castes in UP villages, which are more likely to be mixed in terms of caste composition. And while the physical distance between hamlets is far less than in the hills, the social distance across even proximate hamlets is far greater, which may have even more subtle implications for school placement.⁶³

Other important differences to bear in mind relate to the local economy and class differences that may or may not overlap with caste. In the plains of UP, surplus agricultural production has been pursued through highly differentiated caste hierarchies that connect tightly with occupation. In the hills, meanwhile, caste and economic activities are less tightly linked, owing in part to a subsistence agricultural economy that requires members of all caste groups to perform agricultural labor (Berman 1997). In other words, the social and economic distance across groups varies across these regions as well. However, the nature of caste discrimination and experiences associated within the school system varies in important ways.⁶⁴ For all the above reasons, a study of policy implementation must account for meanings and practices, for they structure the very nature of the “problem” that public agencies set out to “solve.”

⁵⁹ On the disparate practices of caste across the Indian subcontinent, see Ghurye’s (1932) classic study as well as the edited volume by Gupta (1992).

⁶⁰ On the need for “contextualized comparison in the study of policy implementation, see Locke and Thelen (1995).

⁶¹ In many primary schools I visited across the state of UP, Dalit children are made to sit and eat in separate sections of the school campus.

⁶² As I observed in select hill districts of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, upper caste parents continue to object to the hiring of Dalit cooks for the Midday Meal program.

⁶³ On segregation and social distance in UP villages, see

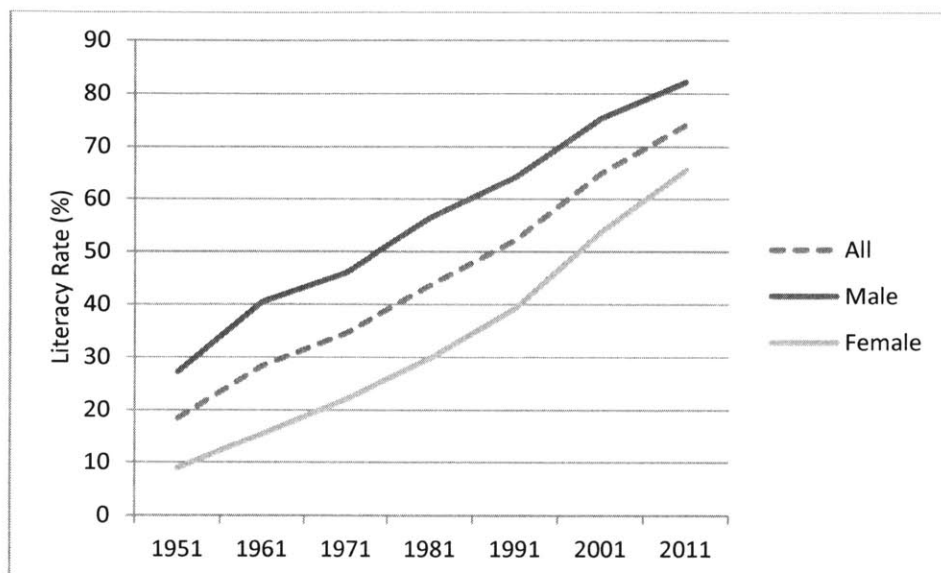
⁶⁴ As part of ethnographic fieldwork conducted at the village-level, I spent significant time interacting with members of the Dalit and OBC community across different regions. These rich conversations shed much light on the experience of being lower caste within the formal school system.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter has helped set the empirical backdrop for the remainder of this dissertation. I discussed the history of primary education policy in India, highlighting the many decades of neglect, which were followed by an more recent outpouring of activity by India's central government. The policy framework under SSA, the Midday Meal program and other central government schemes is common across Indian states, as are the formal institutions and administrative structure of implementing agencies. Holding these features of policy and administration more or less constant, we observe significant subnational variation in policy implementation outcomes across Indian state. Furthermore, our analysis of the procedural commonalities across India's bureaucracies in terms of bureaucratic recruitment and training, along with the geographic limitations on bureaucratic movement—these officials serve the majority of careers within a single state, while at the same time facing transfers to different regions within those same states—make the study of bureaucratic norms all the more compelling. How is it that agencies facing similar formal institutional conditions can operate so differently over policy implementation? The account of civil society's involvement in education and the varying processes of social inequality offered some potential avenues. To explore these and other plausible factors that might account for variation in outcomes, our analysis must move down to the state and local level, where public agencies face concrete problems of implementation. The remainder of this dissertation is devoted to that task.

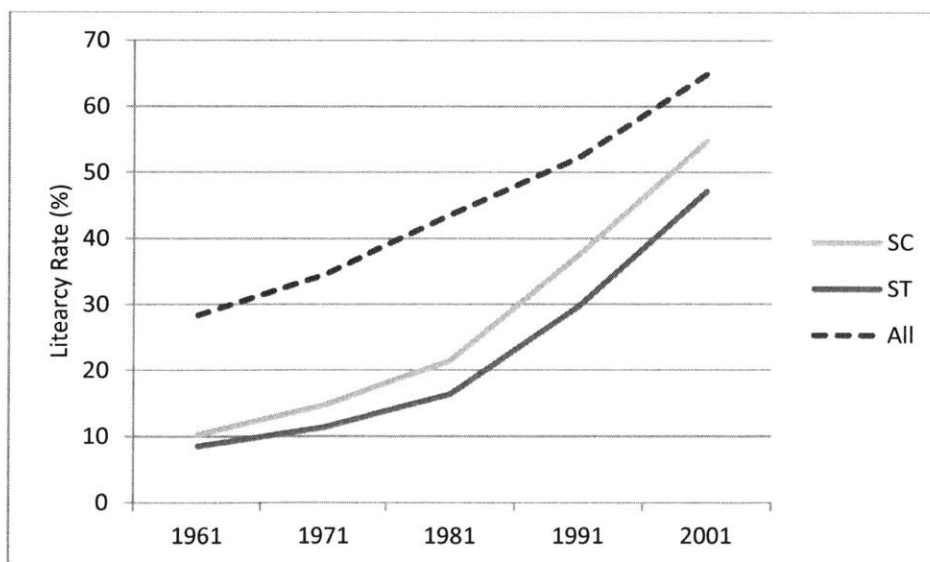
Chapter 2 – Appendix

Figure 2.1. Male and Female Literacy Trends



Source: Census of India, multiple years.

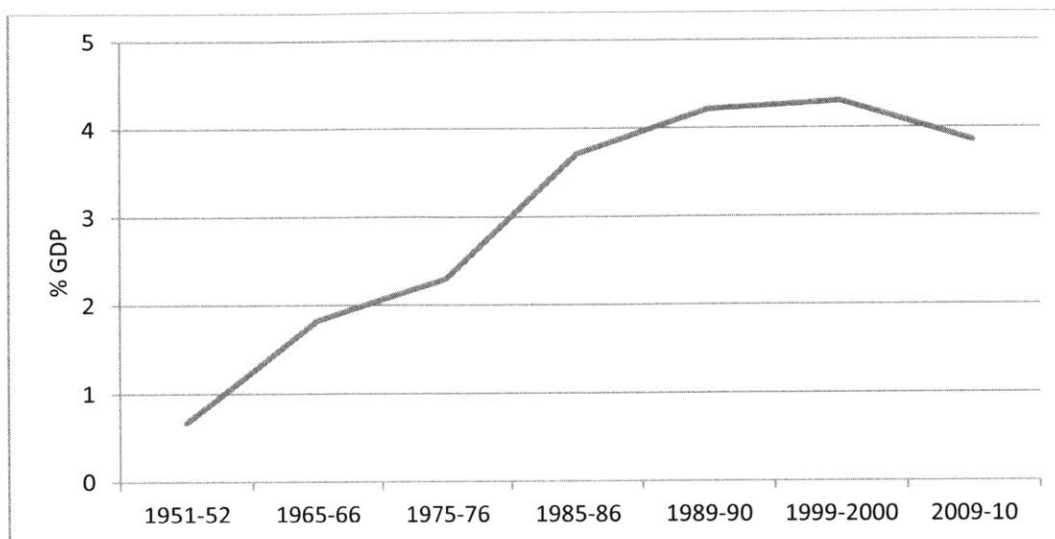
Figure 2.2. Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) Literacy Trends



Source: Census of India, multiple years.

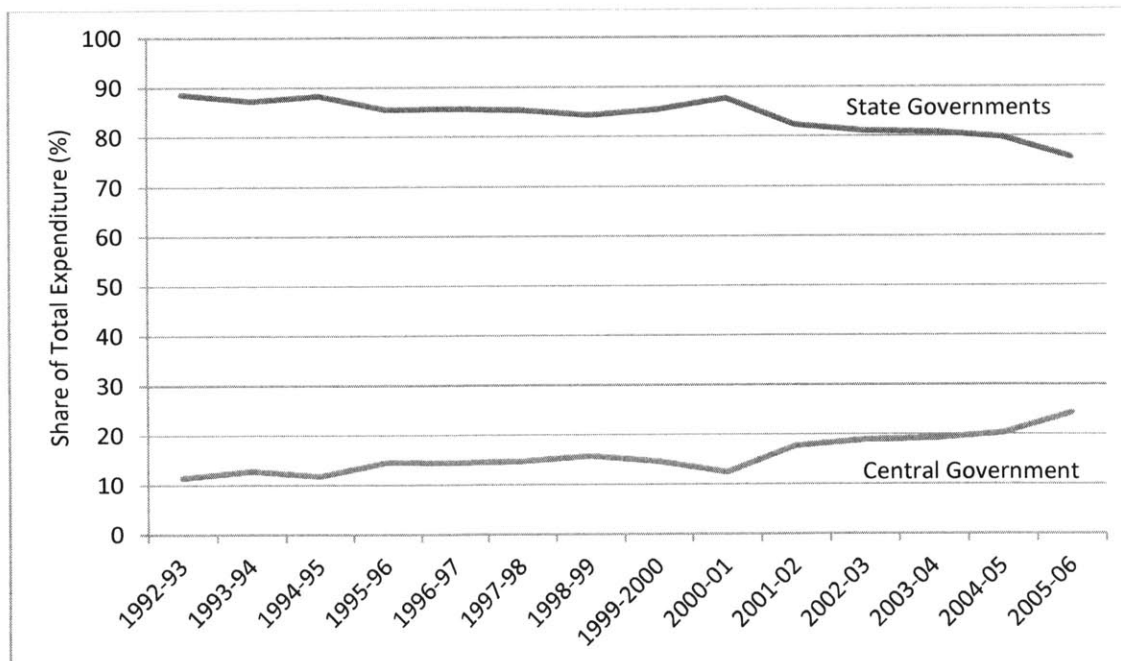
Note: 1951 Census did not report SC/ST literacy. 2011 Census data yet to be released.

Figure 2.3. Total Budgeted Expenditure on Education (% GDP)



Source: Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India (various years).

Figure 2.4. Central and State Governments' Share of Total Budgeted Expenditure on Education



Source: Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India (various years).

Table 2.1. Central Government Policies in Primary Education

Year	Laws and Policies Passed	Notes
1950	Article 45, Constitution of India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free and compulsory education up to age 14
1968	National Policy on Education (NPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy led by Kothari Commission (1964-66) • Emphasized free and compulsory education • Common school system with no tuition • Improved teacher pay, education and service conditions • Regional languages used in education media
1976	Constitutional Amendment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education made a concurrent subject, allowing both central and state governments to enact policies
1986	National Policy on Education (NPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy led by Kothari Commission (1964-66) • Decentralized administration through District Boards of Education to manage • Emphasized free and compulsory education • Common school system with no tuition
1987	Operation Blackboard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic school facilities (e.g. blackboard, books, charts) • Instructional materials for teachers • Additional teachers appointed in schools with enrollment more than 100 students • Financing ratio (center:state) - 60:40 • Teacher salaries paid by central government first 5 years
1993	Supreme Court Decision: <i>Unnikrishnan v. State of Andhra Pradesh</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pronounced Right to Education a Fundamental Right
1994	District Primary Education Program (DPEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralization of education planning and implementation at the district level • Covering about 60% of the country • Enrollment, retention and achievement • Targeted districts with low female literacy with program to reduce gender disparities • World Bank technical support
1995	National Program of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (Midday Meal Program)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandated provision of free meals in all government primary schools • Every child enrolled to be served free meal on school premises • Central government provided food grains • Conversion costs (e.g. cooks and utensils) covered by state governments
2000	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India's Flagship "Education for All" Program • Focused on enrollment, retention and achievement • School infrastructure and student incentives • Teacher training • Targeted programs for girls and disadvantaged groups
2001	Supreme Court Decision: <i>People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India & Others</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directed all state governments that had not yet implement Midday Meal Program to provide cooked meals in schools according to the official policy within six month time frame

2004	Free and Compulsory Education Bill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Precursor to Right to Education (RTE) Act • Drafted by Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD)
2004	Education Cess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income tax of 2% devoted to education • Levied on all major central and state sources of income
2010	The Children's Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act (Right to Education Act)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education declared a fundamental right enforceable by law • Covered all children ages 6-14 • Specific minimum norms within primary schools for physical facilities and school teachers • Required surveys in all neighborhoods to identify children out of school and provide educational facilities to them • Mandated 25% of seats in private schools to be reserved for children belonging to SC/ST categories

Table 2.2. Policy Components of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)

Scheme	Notes
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New school buildings and classrooms • Campus boundary walls, kitchen sheds and water pumps • Norms for maximum school distance from villages: 1 km distance for primary and 3 km for middle schools
Incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholarships conditional on enrollment (SC/ST and girls) • Free uniforms, backpacks and textbooks
Teaching and Learning Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching guides • Interactive wall posters
Teacher training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District Institutes for Education and Training (DIETs) • Pre-service training and bi-annual in-service training
Targeted programs for girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NPEGEL: Districts with low female literacy for program to reduce gender disparities • KGBVs: Residential schools for disadvantaged girls
Decentralized administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District Project Offices • Village Education Committees (VECs) • Habitation-based planning • Surveys to identify out-of-school children

Table 2.3. India's Progress in Primary Education in the 1990s

	1992-3		1998-9	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
<i>School Attendance age 6-14 (%)</i>				
Rural	52	72	70	81
Urban	79	85	86	89
Combined	59	75.5	74	83
<i>Proportion of persons aged 15-19 who have completed (%)</i>				
Grade 5	51	73	61	77
Grade 8	36	54	43	56

Source: National Family Health Survey I (1992-3) and II (1998-9).

Table 2.4. India in Comparative Perspective: Adult and Youth Literacy Rates

	Adult literacy rates (15+ year olds)			Youth Literacy rates (15 – 24 year olds)		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Bangladesh	42.6	51.7	33.1	51.5	59.4	43.1
Pakistan	49.9	63	36	65.5	75.8	54.7
Sri Lanka	90.7	92.3	89.1	95.6	95.1	96.1
India	61	73.4	47.8	76.4	84.2	67.7
China	90.9	95.1	86.5	98.9	99.2	98.5
Brazil	88.6	88.4	88.8	96.8	95.8	97.9
Russian Federation	99.4	99.7	99.2	99.7	99.7	99.8
World	82.2	87.2	77.3	87.3	90.5	84.1
Developing countries	76.8	83.5	70.1	84.8	88.6	80.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	61.2	69.5	53.3	72.9	77.8	68.3

Source: 2000-4 data from the Education for All Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2006), as reported in Kingdon (2007)

Figure 2.5. Subnational Variation: Student Attendance Rates across Indian States (2005-6)

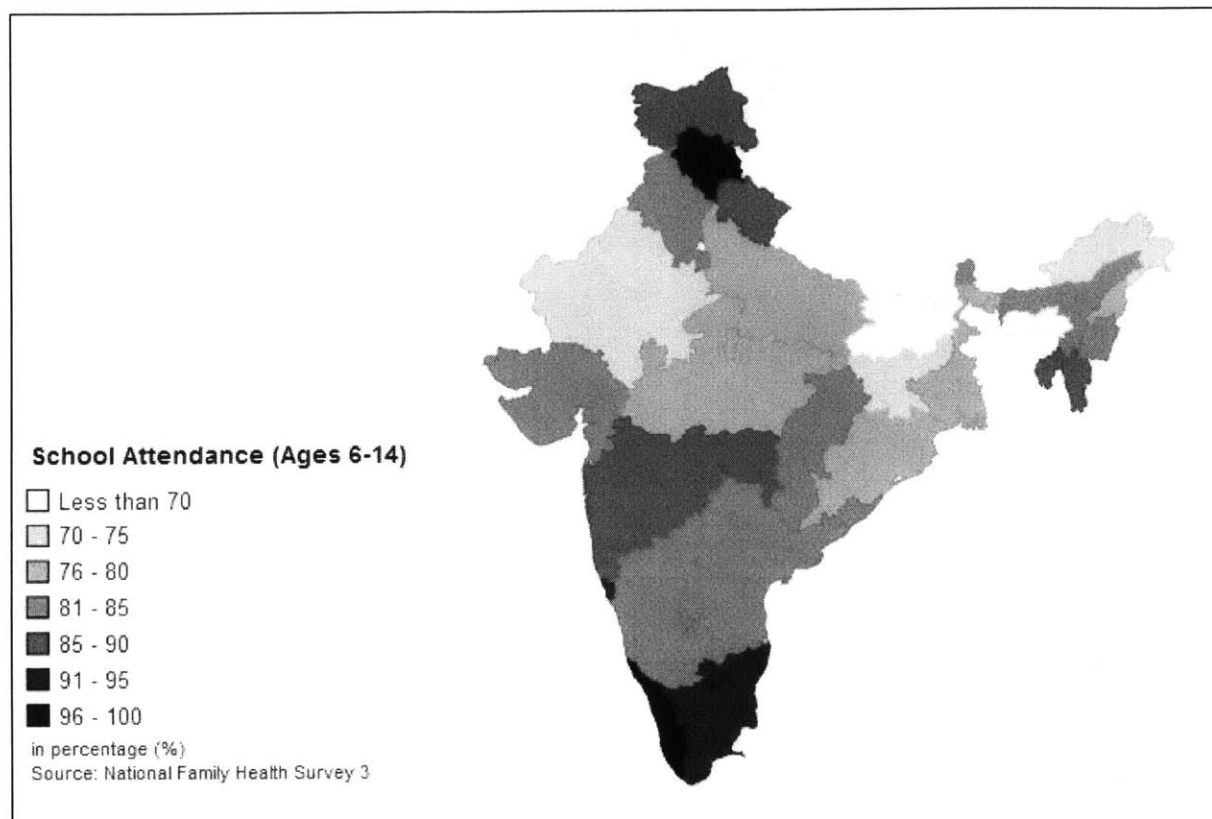


Figure 2.6. Administrative Structure for Primary Education

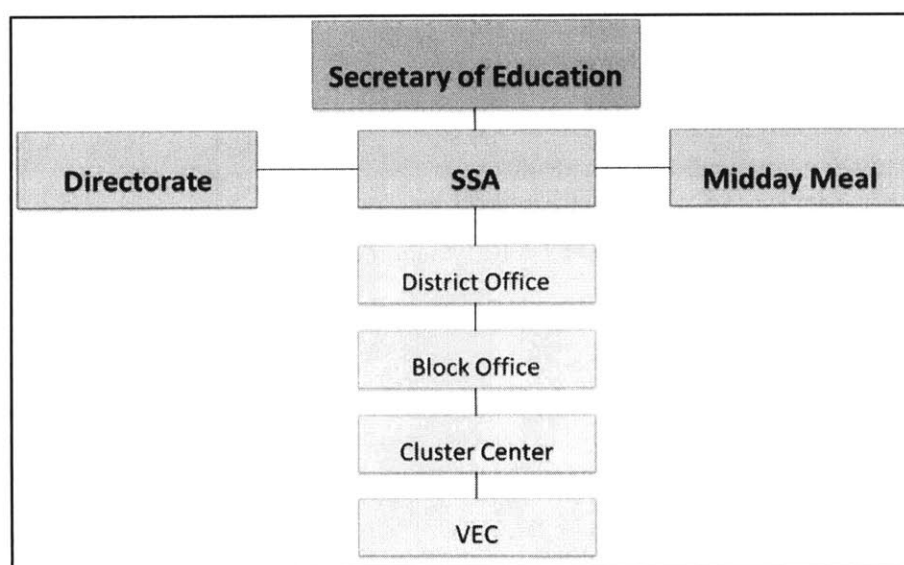


Table 2.5. Bureaucratic Autonomy and Politicization

	Himachal Pradesh	Uttarakhand	Uttar Pradesh
Exclusive employment for the state	✓	✓	✓
Civil service protection	✓	✓	✓
Meritocratic recruitment	✓	✓	✓
Long-term career prospects	✓	✓	✓
High salaries	✓	✓	✓
Bureaucratic transfers (2008-10)			
Secretary of Education	2	2	4
SSA State Project Director	4	2	1

Table 2.6. Administrative Capacity in Education Bureaucracy of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand

	Himachal Pradesh (HP)	Uttarakhand (UK)
State officials	123	119
Local officials	2,665	2,869
School teachers	26,238	25,818
Student-teacher ratio	16	23

Source: Internal documents and interviews with state officials in the Department of Education, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

Chapter 3. Deliberative Norms and Primary Education in Himachal Pradesh

*Implementation of any development project is not possible without the active and widespread participation of the people. It becomes the responsibility of the administrative authority to spot active persons in the local population, awaken their interest and mobilise their initiative.*⁶⁵

3.1. Introduction

Himachal Pradesh stands out among Indian states for its achievements in primary education. Yet this relatively small, north Indian hill state is not the first place one would have expected primary education to be well-implemented. The harsh physical conditions in the Himalayan region place acute constraints on infrastructure development and public service delivery. Conventional wisdom suggests that the spread of mass education follows modernization and economic development. Yet Himachal Pradesh is among India's most rural states, with few urban centers and a highly scattered hill population. It has enjoyed comparatively little industrial development and the economy consists primarily of subsistence agriculture. Nor was HP blessed with progressive social movements or left-leaning political parties, two prominent explanations for the gains in social development achieved by some of its peers.⁶⁶ Despite the odds, HP is on track to meet a majority of the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals by 2015, and is far ahead of other Indian states in primary education, including its much wealthier neighbors located in the plains.⁶⁷

The central objective of this chapter is to make sense of HP's exceptional performance in implementing universal primary education policies. In what follows, I develop an explanation that centers on the norms governing the education bureaucracy. Based on a combination of field research methods, including in-depth interviews, participant observation and village ethnography, I find that deliberative norms governing public agencies in Himachal Pradesh lead to the effective implementation of universal primary education policy. Deliberative norms lead bureaucrats to work collectively across organizational hierarchies and bend official rules to suit varying local contexts. Bureaucrats encourage participation from citizens and civic agencies to identify and solve problems on the ground. Marginalized citizens, in turn, witness the benefits of collective action and learn to voice their demands to the state. Through coordinated bureaucratic action and civic engagement, policy implementation is responsive to local needs, generating positive outcomes for universal primary education.

The rest of this chapter is organized as follows. Section 3.2 begins with an account of HP's achievements in universal primary education. Based on a comprehensive set of outcome indicators, I present a nuanced picture of the educational scenario within the state and consider some alternative explanations for the success of implementation. I then provide a preview of the argument in Section 3.3, where I offer preview of the larger empirical findings and detail the mechanisms through which deliberative norms generate implementation outcomes for primary education policy. Sections 3.4 and 3.5 present the main empirical findings of the chapter. I first establish the presence of deliberative norms within the state, drawing on the fieldwork conducted inside the state as well as outside the state.

⁶⁵ Excerpt taken from Himachal Pradesh State Development Report (Planning Commission 2005: 255).

⁶⁶ See the role of left-leaning parties and social movements, see Kohli (1987) and Heller (1999).

⁶⁷ See UNDP (2002) and World Bank (2007).

Fieldwork conducted at the state and local levels demonstrates that deliberative norms have enabled public agencies in Himachal Pradesh to effectively implement primary education across a range of activities, from school planning and infrastructure development to local monitoring. Furthermore, I show that deliberative norms lead bureaucrats to promote civic participation throughout the policy implementation process, which improves the functioning of primary schools and quality of service delivery. I reconsider the findings in light of alternative explanations in Section 3.6, including the possibility of reverse causality and other plausible mechanisms based on theories of civil society and social capital. Section 3.7 concludes the chapter with a summary of the main findings and a segue to the comparative analysis of Uttarakhand in Chapter 4.

3.2. The Educational Scenario in Himachal Pradesh

Nestled in the western Himalayan region, the hill areas that comprise Himachal Pradesh (pop. 6.8 million) have a checkered history of administration. At the time of independence, HP was a loose confederation of approximately 31 princely states administered by India's central government. It was later raised to the status of a Part C state in 1952, which provided for a small legislative assembly and limited government, though still far short of statehood. HP was then reverted back to a Union Territory in 1956, dissolving its legislative assembly and placing it again under central administration. Between the years 1961-1971, the state underwent significant changes to its jurisdictional boundaries with the addition and reorganization of districts.⁶⁸ It became the eighteenth state of the Indian union on the 25th of January, 1971.⁶⁹ Present day Himachal Pradesh is surrounded in all directions by neighboring states and shares a border with China to the east. The twelve districts that comprise the state present remarkable geographic and sociocultural heterogeneity (see Figure 3.1 in the chapter Appendix).

Notwithstanding significant administrative challenges, Himachal Pradesh has achieved near universal primary school enrollment and currently records the second highest literacy rate among major Indian states. It trails only Kerala, India's much vaunted case of social development. As Dreze and Sen (2002) point out, however, the advancement of primary schooling in HP is in many respects even more extraordinary than Kerala's achievements. For one, the initial conditions in Himachal Pradesh were far less favorable. Around the time of independence, the hill region suffered near universal illiteracy (93 percent) and was classified as an educationally "backward" region in north India (see Figure 3.2 in Chapter Appendix). Kerala, meanwhile, was already far ahead of the rest of India at this time. Even as late as 1971, which is when India's central government first granted Himachal Pradesh statehood, primary school enrollment and literacy rates were below the national average. As the much-discussed Public Report on Basic Education pointed out, the "schooling revolution" of Himachal Pradesh took place over a short period of time (PROBE Team 1999). Within just two decades, HP made remarkable progress in expanding the reach not only of primary schooling, but child health as well.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ With the reorganization of neighboring Punjab in 1966, four Hindi-speaking districts (Kangra, Kullu, Lahaul-Spiti and Shimla) that formed the Punjab hills were added to Himachal Pradesh.

⁶⁹ Dr. Y.S. Parmar, led the movement for a separate state of Himachal Pradesh, and later became its first Chief Minister.

⁷⁰ The comparison with Kerala is telling. By 2002, HP had 138.65 primary schools, 5.0 Primary Health Centers and 165.69 hospital beds per 100,000 people. Kerala meanwhile had 21.91 schools, 3.03 Primary Health Centers, and 134.3 hospital beds. To be sure, some of the discrepancy between HP and Kerala in the ratio of schools can be attributed to

Kerala's gains in education and literacy took place over the course of many decades, with several conducive factors at work: an "enlightened" leadership prior to independence, Christian missionaries emphasizing mass education, a history of social movements tied to literacy and equality across caste and gender, and last but not least, Leftist political leadership under India's Communist Party (CPI-M). None of the above factors obtained in HP, and yet the expansion of primary education has been remarkable. Perhaps even more significant are the gains in distributional equity. Traditionally disadvantaged groups utilize and benefit from these public investments, in the absence of social movements and Leftist governments. School enrollment for disadvantaged groups, including rural girls, Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) has quickly caught pace, and drop-out rates are much lower in comparison to states (PROBE 1999).

3.2.1. School Access and Infrastructure

In terms of student enrollment and attendance, two crucial indicators of school access, HP is among the best performing states in India. These achievements are connected to the remarkable expansion of school infrastructure across the state. Although school infrastructure expansion took off in HP even before the central government enacted SSA and other policies, the state has continued to make significant progress in that area. By official sources, 306 new government primary schools and 1,341 new middle schools were opened across the state between the years 2002-2011, an expansion of nearly 15 percent in less than a decade (NUEPA 2012). Importantly, the expansion of infrastructure has closely tracked the needs of communities within the hill region. According to the *PROBE Revisited* report, a reassessment of primary schooling conditions in north Indian states by the original PROBE research team, the expansion of schooling has ensured that children have access to primary schools close to their habitations. Nearly 90 percent of surveyed parents said that their local primary school was less than 30 minutes away, and the average reported time to reach school was only 20 minutes, a significant achievement given low population density and highly dispersed settlement patterns in the Himalayan region (De, Khera et al. 2011: 97).

At the same time, it should be noted that the provision of physical facilities within schools is about average for India. Table 3.1 summarizes the data from Pratham's ASER Report on the presence of school facilities and physical inputs in government primary schools in rural Himachal Pradesh. The facilities listed in the table, such as classrooms and school boundary walls, are provided by SSA, the central government's flagship education program. The provision of these facilities is deemed mandatory under India's recently passed Right to Education Act. Data for the other two states included in this study are provided for comparison. Interestingly, in some areas it performs worse than Uttar Pradesh, such as in the provision of toilets and school boundary walls. Taken together, the outcomes for school infrastructure indicate that public agencies in HP have been effective in providing schools to all communities. Even the smallest villages located in remote regions of the state are served by primary schools. At the same time, agencies have not closely followed the infrastructure mandates prescribed under India's primary education policy.

the relatively small and geographically scattered distribution of habitations across HP. But the fact that the state has been effective in implementing social services like primary schooling across a scattered population merits attention.

The school infrastructure gains made by Himachal Pradesh have been matched by the growth of student enrollment and attendance across the state. According to the latest ASER report, which surveys progress in primary education each year across rural India, less than one percent of children in the age group 6-14 were out of school during the 2011 academic year (ASER 2012). Gains in access to schooling have also helped close the gender gap by raising the enrollment of rural girls, a particularly vulnerable group. The ASER survey finds that the proportion of rural girls ages 11-14 who were out of school came down to 1 percent in 2011.

No less noteworthy are the achievements in student attendance. While enrollment rates have soared across rural India, regular student attendance continues to pose a significant challenge. Some even question the reliability of enrollment rates, as they may reflect only “nominal” enrollment, i.e. children whose names are written in official enrollment registers but fail to show up (Drèze and Sen 2002). Meanwhile, the true proportion of students that regularly participate in the school system is likely to be much lower. Himachal Pradesh has gone against that trend, consistently showing high rates of student attendance. The latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS) finds that 96.2 percent of children ages 6-14 were attending school in rural Himachal Pradesh during the 2005-06 school year, far above the national average of 79.6 percent for rural India (NFHS-3 2007). That places HP at the top of the national chart, only marginally behind Kerala (97.8 percent) and ahead of other top-performing states like Tamil Nadu (93.4 percent).

Table 3.1 School Facilities and Physical Inputs
(% of schools that have the following)

State	At least one classroom per teacher	Office / Storage space	Boundary Wall	Drinking water facility	Toilets	Kitchen shed
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	76.7	75.5	37.3	87.5	89.2	82.0
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	81.6	87.9	67.0	77.9	94.2	96.3
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	87.4	88.6	44.4	93.1	93.3	89.3
All India	75.6	74.5	52.2	82.6	89.9	81.3

Source: ASER Report (2011).

3.2.2. Service Delivery

Moving beyond infrastructure provision to outcomes related to educational service delivery, Himachal Pradesh performs significantly better than most other states (see Tables 3.2-3.6). Take first the Indian government’s Midday Meal program, a major policy for improving child nutrition and school attendance. According to the ASER survey data, India’s Midday Meal program was found to be functioning in 98 percent of primary schools, significantly higher than in most Indian states. These findings are further supported by field studies showing high rates of community participation in the Midday Meal program (PROBE Team 1999; De, Khera et al. 2011).

Table 3.2 Provision of Midday Meal

	Midday Meal Served on day of school visit (%)
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	98.0
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	95.1
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	71.2
All India	83.4

Source: ASER Report (2011).

Before examining other aspects of service delivery, it is important to note that school teacher absence is as much of a problem in Himachal Pradesh as it is in other Indian states. According to the most comprehensive survey undertaken, the rate of school teacher absence (21.2 percent), while slightly below average and notably less than that of Uttarakhand, its hilly neighbor, remains alarmingly high (see Table 3.3). The primary school system in Himachal Pradesh has followed the national trend across India in which government school teachers have grown increasingly unaccountable to parents and the local communities they serve.⁷¹ That is an important observation, as it points to the fact that HP's political system is not immune from the school teacher politics and weak accountability that pervade India's education system. Public officials in Himachal Pradesh have themselves pointed out that the expansion of primary schooling has been rife with patronage politics, with school teachers exerting political influence for desirable postings and resisting pressures for accountability (Sood 2003; Sanan 2004).

Table 3.3 Teacher Absence Rate

State	Teacher Absence (%)
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	21.2
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	32.8
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	26.3
Weighted Average	24.8

Source: Kremer et al. (2005)

Notwithstanding common political pressures, the school system in Himachal Pradesh still continues to function much better than in other states. The incidence of single-teacher schools,

⁷¹ As I discussed in Chapter 2, school teachers wield significant political power, and teachers' unions have consistently blocked efforts to make them more accountable to parents and local communities. That observation is no less true for Himachal Pradesh, or even the educationally advanced south Indian states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, which also display rates of teacher absence above 20 percent (Kremer, Muralidharan et al. 2005).

which reflects the implementation of policies for the recruitment and posting of school teachers, shows Himachal Pradesh ahead of the pack, with less than eight percent of schools having only one teacher (see Table 3.4). That achievement must be recognized within the context of delivering primary education within the Himalayan region. The rapid development of primary schools across highly dispersed settlements has meant that, a much larger number of schools have to be provided school teachers, including those located in the interior hills, all of which makes it much harder to ensure that teachers are allocated to every school. The relatively low incidence of single-teacher schools in HP reflects the state's ability to meet the needs of each community, even those located in the remotest regions of the state.

Along with teachers, schools within HP are significantly more likely to be equipped with academic resources such as libraries and teaching-learning materials (Table 3.5). The provision of these academic resources creates a learning environment within schools, which helps further attract and retain students. As the data indicate, HP's education system is ahead not only with respect to enrollment, but student retention as well. As Table 3.6 shows, official dropout rates for boys and girls at the primary school level.⁷² At below three percent, HP's official dropout rate (which corresponds to independent assessments) is far below that of neighboring states. These observations are further supported by surveys of parental satisfaction with the school system (PROBE Team 1999; De, Khera et al. 2011). According to the most recent survey, parents in Himachal Pradesh were significantly more satisfied with the functioning of government primary schools compared to their counterparts in neighboring states of north India.⁷³

Table 3.4 Single-Teacher Primary Schools

	% Primary schools	% Students enrolled
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	7.9	4.6
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	19.5	10.6
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	3.0	2.3
<i>All India</i>	11.8	6.1

Source: ASER Report (2011).

Table 3.5 Library and Teaching-Learning Materials
(% of schools that have these available)

⁷² Given pressures to inflate official statistics, actual dropout rates are likely to be higher.

⁷³ In the *PROBE Revisited* household survey, parents were asked the question, "If costs of education remained the same, would you prefer to send your children to a government or private school?" Close to 50 percent of parents in Himachal Pradesh said they would opt for government schools, as compared to 30 percent of parents who said so in neighboring north Indian states (De, Khera et al. 2011: 106).

	Library Books	Teaching-Learning Materials
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	80.3	91.5
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	48.6	82.4
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	47.7	73.5
<i>All India</i>	63.1	80.4

Source: ASER Report (2011).

Table 3.6 Student Dropout Rate
(% students in grades 1-5)

	Boys	Girls	All
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	2.6	2.7	2.6
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	7.4	6.3	6.9
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	17.4	15.0	16.2
<i>All India</i>	10.15	9.75	9.95

Source: Mehta (2011)

The superior performance of the government primary school system within HP is evidenced further by data on student learning levels. The latest ASER Report, approximately 8 percent of fifth graders surveyed cannot read from a second grade textbook, while only 12 percent of them cannot do basic arithmetic involving two-digit subtraction, much lower than the corresponding figures for most other states (ASER 2012). These outcomes are significantly better than most other Indian states. That said, learning levels in Himachal Pradesh still show much room for improvement. As discussed earlier Chapter 2, HP is no exception to the nationwide trend in India of poor learning outcomes. Nevertheless, within the context of India's comparatively low learning levels, it remains far ahead of other Indian states. According to the ASER data, it is among the few states that has not shown a decline in learning levels over time with the implementation of universal primary schooling.

Taken as a whole, the comprehensive indicators show that public agencies in Himachal Pradesh have been highly effective in implementing universal primary education policy. From school infrastructure, student enrollment and retention and educational service delivery, Himachal Pradesh performs at the top among Indian states. HP has been able to address the schooling needs of its interior regions and disadvantaged social groups, raising the participation of girls and lower castes, leading to a broadly inclusive primary school system. As a final point worth noting, these achievements in primary education can be attributed almost entirely to *public* efforts (Drèze and Sen 2002). While privatization has grown over time, the prevalence of rural private schooling is well below the national average and also much lower compared to the other states examined in this study.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ In their survey of private schooling, Muralidharan and Kremer (2007) find that 15 percent of villages sampled in Himachal Pradesh have private schools, as compared to 28 percent across all of India, and a much larger percentage in neighboring states such as Punjab and Haryana.

3.2.3. *The Limits of Modernization and Economic Development*

Before going further, it helps to consider some alternative explanations that may account for the effectiveness of policy implementation within Himachal Pradesh. Theories of modernization associate the expansion of mass education with economic development, industrialization and urbanization. Yet these are not the ingredients behind HP's achievements. The state's harsh topography and severe climate present major obstacles for economic growth. It is very costly to construct and maintain roads, school buildings and other physical infrastructure in the Himalayan region. Road and building projects are difficult to execute; habitual landslides and winter weather provide no guarantee of successful completion. Prohibitively high production and transport costs make it difficult to attract new industry to the state, making HP among India's least industrialized. Over 90 percent of the population secures its living from small-scale agriculture, animal husbandry, and more recently, horticulture (UNDP 2002).

Though it is not the poorest state in India, HP is not wealthy. State per capita income today is slightly above average for India, though it has been below the national average throughout most of its history. The two neighboring states of Punjab and Haryana, which are far wealthier, display significantly worse outcomes in primary education. Along the same lines, HP's economic growth rate since independence has closely tracked the national average. Growth only began to take off in the 1990s, by which time the state had already begun to make significant progress in implementing primary education policy (World Bank 2007). Per capita income around that time was near or below the national average. HP's economic began to record higher rates of growth after education was already on the rise. Economic growth was probably not the cause of policy implementation, though it may have played a role in helping to sustain HP's achievements over time.

Along with an unspectacular economy, there are other reasons not to have expected primary education to succeed in this state. Personal travel on the precarious hill terrain, over short distances even, is physically demanding and potentially hazardous, especially for young children.⁷⁵ Habitations within the Himalayan region are dispersed over large topographic distances, making it very costly for the state to build, maintain and monitor primary schools. It is much less costly (and politically more rewarding) for governments to provide education and other social services in areas with geographically concentrated populations, particularly in towns and cities, where demand is also expected to be higher. Yet HP is among the least urbanized states in India and has the lowest population density in the country.

Another set of explanations points to the role of social structure and caste. India's Himalayan region displays a preponderance of upper caste groups, particularly Brahmins and Kshatriya. Moreover, compared to the plains regions of north India, social equalities based on caste and gender run less deep in Himachal Pradesh, owing perhaps to the subsistence economy in the hills. The system of landlordism (*zamindari*) imposed by the British across the Gangetic plain led to severe inequalities and exploitation of lower castes. Some argue that these historical institutions continue to influence the delivery of public goods, though their effect has greatly decreased over time (Banerjee, Iyer et al. 2005). The hills, meanwhile, were spared of such polarizing institutions, and lower caste groups were less dependent on upper castes for their livelihood.

⁷⁵ The author can attest to both facts based on personal experience.

Although it would be a mistake to discount the pernicious influence of caste and gender discrimination in the Gangetic plains, one must be careful not to oversimplify social structure in the hill region. Though it may take on different forms, caste discrimination has long existed within the Himalayan region.⁷⁶ Dalits, the former untouchables of the caste system, were traditionally excluded from entering upper caste temples in Himachal Pradesh. Across many parts of the state, the *bajjis*, as they are known, were required to stand outside village temples during Hindu festivals to perform drums and other musical instruments to invoke the local village deity (*devta*).⁷⁷ Moreover, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 4, very similar caste and gender norms in the neighboring hill state of Uttarakhand have not translated into effective policy implementation. The comparison between these two states points to the limitations of arguments emphasizing social structure.

3.3. Mechanisms Illustrated

The above discussion helps contextualize the exceptional performance of Himachal Pradesh in implementing universal primary education. Not only has the state achieved remarkable gains in physical infrastructure and access, but the functioning of schools is far superior in comparison to other Indian states. Even with a common set of policies and administrative resources, public agencies in Himachal Pradesh have proven far more effective in carrying out their mission in a challenging physical environment. Yet some conventional theories fail to account for these achievements. In this section, I offer a preview of the argument based on findings that help illustrate the mechanisms of the theory and anchor the discussion of deliberative norms. I begin with a puzzling vignette taken from District Shimla, demonstrate how local officials understand and carry out their responsibilities. I then lay out the mechanisms by which deliberative norms are theorized to generate positive outcomes for implementation in Himachal Pradesh.

3.3.1 Motivating Vignette

Nestled in the Himalayan foothills, Shimla, the present-day state capital of Himachal Pradesh once served as the summer capital for the British colonial government. It was from this rural town that the British controlled a global empire. Little investment was made, however, to develop the local economy and surrounding communities. A short walk from the town center reveals how little has changed since colonial times. Small villages made up of scattered hamlets no larger than a few houses apiece speckle the rugged landscape far out into the horizon. Subsistence farming on tiny landholdings is how most families eke out a livelihood, though young men (and increasingly women) seek education and employment outside their villages. Harsh terrain and severe weather conditions put transportation to a standstill for months on end, limiting the scope for industry and economic

⁷⁶ Nor should we assume that geography by itself necessitates greater equality across caste groups. The neighboring country of Nepal, a largely hill-based economy, has one of the most oppressive caste systems in South Asia (Bennett 2005).

⁷⁷ According to interviews with local scholars and residents of Himachal Pradesh, these practices continue to this day, though they meet growing resistance. I observed caste exclusion first hand as well. During fieldwork, I was required to verify my caste credentials with local *pandits* (priests) before entering village temples, which were not open to Dalits and other lower caste groups.

activities beyond agriculture. It was in this unlikely corner of the Himalaya that a “schooling revolution” had taken place.⁷⁸

Eager to understand more about it, I arrived at the office of the local education bureaucracy in Shimla. I was warmly greeted by Mr. Chauhan, one of the senior officials stationed there. I asked him questions about the expansion of primary school infrastructure, implementation of the Midday Meal program, and other policies enacted by the state. Our conversation, however, took an unexpected turn as he began to describe a program he had helped develop to provide schooling to children belonging to the Muslim Gujjar community. A small nomadic tribe, the Gujjars would spend their summers herding cattle in Shimla and return to their agricultural base in Saharanpur, a district located in the fertile Gangetic plain in the nearby state of Uttar Pradesh. Seeing the toll this nomadic lifestyle was taking on the education of Gujjar children, Mr. Chauhan and his colleagues came up with a plan to create a mobile primary school for the tribe. Wherever the Gujjars would travel, the school would follow in a small caravan comprised of teachers and learning materials. And like that, in a matter of a few years, the first batch of Gujjar children in Shimla was able to complete primary school.

Straightforward as this anecdote may sound, I found Mr. Chauhan’s enthusiasm for the mobile school somewhat puzzling. Why spend scarce time and administrative resources towards creating a program that targets a politically irrelevant population within Shimla? Nowhere in the policies of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, India’s flagship program for universal primary education, was it written that a mobile school should be provided to children belonging to nomadic tribes. Policies to expand school infrastructure, appoint new teachers and provide incentives like the Midday Meal, all of which constitute the bread and butter of primary education policy in India, were not the basis for this simple yet compelling innovation. Nor was there anything special about the formal incentives and career trajectory of this education officer and his supporting team. Like his colleagues in other parts of Himachal Pradesh as well as other nearby states, Mr. Chauhan competed in a state-wide exam administered by the Public Service Commission and had risen through the ranks based on his seniority. Political gain could not form the basis for his actions either. Given the tiny size of the Muslim Gujjar population in Shimla, the potential electoral benefits from this investment would have been negligible at best. By contrast, no such program had even been considered by his counterparts in District Saharanpur of Uttar Pradesh, a place where Gujjars reside in far greater numbers and carry political clout.

As I met more bureaucrats in Shimla, this particular officer’s story began to appear less and less unique. In a far-flung corner of the district, Govindji, a local official much his junior in rank had created a program for educating migrant child laborers hailing from poor, far-off states like Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. While making his school monitoring rounds each week, he would notice them working at construction sites along the one road connecting the administrative block where he was posted to district headquarters in Shimla. Determined to address the problem, Govindji proposed a plan to his seniors and with their support was able to attach an alternative school close to the construction sites. “Why create schools for children that do not even live in Himachal Pradesh?”, I asked him. “*Well of course we care about Himachali children, but they too are children of India,*” he replied. Yet even his personal concern for the migrant children could not explain why he was able to break with official policy, which required that new schools be built according to

⁷⁸ PROBE, “The Schooling Revolution in Himachal Pradesh,” *Public Report on Basic Education in India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 115.

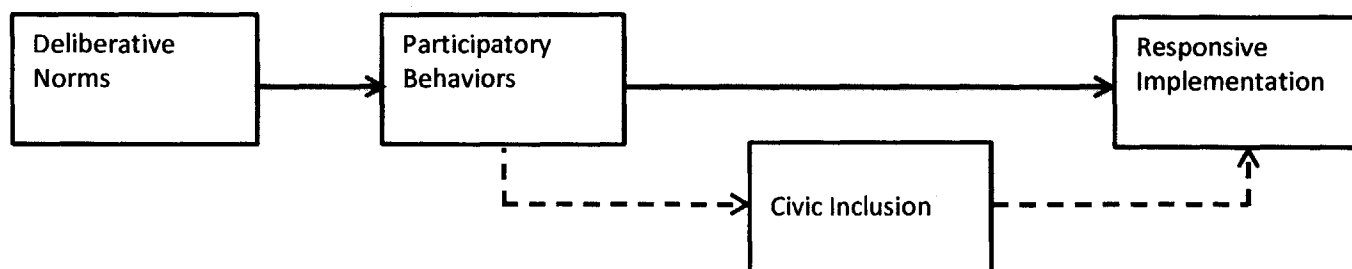
official rules of access and school distance from a village so that no child would have to walk more than a kilometer to reach school. Yet here he was targeting children without a formally recognized place of residence, coordinating with the local police to identify their (illegal) makeshift accommodations, and persuading their parents to send them regularly to the new primary school constructed on their behalf.

3.3.2. *The Argument in Brief*

From the vantage point of official policy, the formal incentives system within the bureaucracy, and logic of electoral politics, the actions I describe above make little sense. Yet as I demonstrate below, they reflect a more general logic by which public agencies operate in Himachal Pradesh, namely the logic of deliberative norms. As I theorize in Chapter 1, deliberative norms lead to participatory behavior among bureaucrats (see below Figure 3.3). Public officials learn to discuss practical matters of implementation across formal organizational divides, coordinate efforts to solve problems collectively, and adapt official rules and policies to meet ground realities. Importantly, lower-level bureaucrats learn to share practical concerns and experiences with seniors, allowing local knowledge to move up the hierarchy.

Deliberative norms also lead public officials to seek input from citizens and civic organizations. In much the same way that senior officials encourage input from their subordinates, local public officials learn to draw upon the knowledge and organizational resources of citizens and civic agencies, whose collective vigilance and input helps improve the functioning of primary schools. The participatory behavior of public officials helps further sustain the collective action of local communities, who come to experience tangible benefits of organizing around primary education. Taken together, these behaviors generate a responsive implementation process, which leads to positive outcomes for universal primary education.

Figure 3.3. Theoretical Process



The theoretical process I describe above helps illuminate the mobile school example presented above. When he first came to learn about the difficulties enrolling Gujar children, Mr. Chauhan was unsure how to proceed. The tribe, after all, spent more of its time outside of HP in the plains district of Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh. Mr. Chauhan discussed the problem with his senior colleagues in the education bureaucracy. They encouraged him to take time away from his

normal routine and travel down with a small team to Saharanpur, as an “*exposure visit*,” to learn more about the nomadic community of Gujjars and work towards a practical solution. As Mr. Chauhan explained:

*With the support from the Department, I visited the Mohammedan Gujjar community in Saharanpur. The children were lagging far behind and their parents had doubts about the school system. We explained to them that SSA provides all the inputs, like books, uniforms, bags, free of cost. So that helped.*⁷⁹

The exposure visit not only presented the Gujjar community with information about state programs, but provided Mr. Chauhan and his team with relevant knowledge about their distinct needs. The wider thinking within the bureaucracy at the time was that the Gujjars most probably did not want primary schooling. Their children performed critical economic roles, tending to their cattle and buffalo. Yet Mr. Chauhan’s team found that the community had an interest in educating their children. As another official went on to describe:

During our interactions, one Gujjar said, “If I send my child to the school, then who will watch my buffalo?” Then another replied back to him, “If your buffalo is keeping your kid from school, throw it out!” A larger discussion ensued...and we learned that there was a latent demand for education.

The Gujjar community wanted schooling, but not necessarily in the standard format provided by the state. They required a more flexible approach that would accommodate their nomadic livelihood and the fact that children contributed to it through their labor. Senior officials took a keen interest in the experience of Mr. Chauhan and his team. A plan had to be made for hiring teachers to the run school for the nomadic tribe, which was nowhere written in the official policy framework. Importantly, senior officials called on his team to discuss the matter together and find a collective solution. They settled upon hiring volunteer teachers who would be appointed on a contractual basis. Later on, these teachers would be promoted to become *Vidya Upasaks*, a para-teacher scheme that was adopted by the state.

As the example illustrates, norms within the bureaucracy encouraged officials to communicate and work collectively across hierarchical boundaries, draw upon local knowledge and adapt policies to suit local needs. Far from an isolated case, I found numerous examples of this behavior in the field, across a wide range of tasks and situations. To see more concretely how deliberative norms generate the implementation outcomes observed in Himachal Pradesh, it helps to break apart the administrative tasks required for implementing universal primary education. Figure 3.4 summarizes these tasks and describes how public agencies governed by deliberative norms are theorized to carry them out. These tasks can be divided into three broad categories: (1) school planning and provision, (2) delivery of educational services, and (3) system monitoring and feedback. While the first category involves activities related to *quantitative* improvements, like the development of physical infrastructure and school facilities, the latter two sets of activities are more closely tied to the *quality* of service delivery. System monitoring and local feedback is particularly relevant to education quality, since the daily functioning of primary schools is largely outside the hands of state planners.

⁷⁹ Interview with senior official, District Project Office, SSA, Shimla, March 5, 2010.

Figure 3.4 Policy Implementation: Tasks and Behaviors

Administrative Tasks	Bureaucratic Behaviors
<i>School planning and provision</i>	
School infrastructure development	-Conduct deliberative planning process with input from multiple agencies and civic actors
Regional planning and policy targeting	-Adapt policies to suit the context across different regions and social groups
<i>Educational service delivery</i>	
Teacher posting	-Apply flexible teacher allocation process according to school needs
Academic support	- Coordinate with school teachers and civic agencies to provide academic resources
Community support	-Work with both official and unofficial groups to identify and address school needs
<i>Monitoring and feedback</i>	
System monitoring	-Combine official inspections and surveys with unofficial, community-based monitoring
Local feedback	- Incorporate local feedback from informal groups and through unofficial channels

As a preview to the detailed case studies presented in the following section, let us consider some examples of how deliberative norms shape bureaucratic behavior around these activities. Take first the activities associated with school planning and provision. India's primary education policies aim to achieve universal access through the construction of new schools in underserved communities. In carrying out that task, public agencies in Himachal Pradesh tend to encourage broad participation from officials across the organizational hierarchy, along with elected leaders and civic agencies working at the grassroots level. Through the exchange of information and local knowledge, public officials tailor educational development plans based on varying local contexts. Similarly, agencies involved in carrying out new school construction tend to consult with local communities in deciding where to place new schools, even when doing so may break with official rules. As a result, agencies are more likely to meet the educational needs facing communities.

While school infrastructure planning is relatively straightforward and requires comparatively less community input, regional planning and policy targeting is far more complicated. India's universal primary education program provides a standard framework and resources for special programs that target underperforming regions and disadvantaged social groups, such as disabled children and out-of-school girls. Public agencies in Himachal Pradesh will tend to apply these policies flexibly and adapt them to the varying conditions of different regions and social groups. They will tend to coordinate with local officials from underserved regions and draw input from civic agencies working with disadvantaged social groups to tailor programs in a context-specific manner. As a result, these policies are more likely to reach intended recipients and address their educational needs.

Consider, finally, the activities around monitoring and feedback, the mechanisms by which public agencies try to ensure that the education system is functioning well. Bureaucrats have in theory a range of possible methods at their disposal for monitoring the education system. Agencies in Himachal Pradesh will tend to combine the official school inspection system with unofficial mechanisms of feedback from local communities, which are often better situated to identify problems. Importantly, they will seek input not only from formally recognized bodies such as Village Education Committees (VECs), but also informal groups at the village level, such as women's associations. Given the fact that formal village institutions are often dominated by privileged social groups, the ability to work with informal groups, particularly women's associations, enables agencies in Himachal Pradesh to identify and respond to the problems facing marginalized communities. With the encouragement of public agencies, local communities see the benefits of investing time and resources to keep a check on primary schooling and report gaps in service delivery. As a result, monitoring systems work more effectively to ensure that schools are functioning well.

3.4. Deliberative Norms in Himachal Pradesh

Having reviewed the mechanisms by which deliberative norms are theorized to influence policy implementation in Himachal Pradesh, this section turns to the main empirical findings of the chapter. I begin by demonstrating the existence of deliberative norms within the Himachali state, drawing on examples taken from different subdivisions and levels of the education bureaucracy as well as the experiences of civic actors involved in primary education. I then go on to present a series of case demonstrating how deliberative norms shape implementation across the range of tasks associated with primary education policy.

3.4.1. Inside the State

Viewed from the outside, the Himachali state appears no different from others in India. The bureaucracy in Himachal Pradesh is organized hierarchically and divided functionally by policy domain. Civil service examinations determine who gets hired, and promotion is based largely on seniority along with performance in terms of meeting official policy targets. With respect to material and human resources, what one may refer to as "administrative capacity" within the state, the education bureaucracy in HP is again unremarkable. The Department of Elementary Education, which combines primary and middle school, is organized according to the same administrative blueprint and endowed with the same material and human resources as in other states.

Nor is there anything peculiar about the formal training of public officials in HP. In fact, when Himachal Pradesh was first granted statehood in 1971, bureaucrat from the Uttar Pradesh cadre of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) were summoned to train and help guide the bureaucracy on how to administer the fledgling state. At the senior levels of bureaucracy, particularly within the IAS, an administrative position in the relatively small hill state has not carried

the same degree of prestige as a posting in the politically prominent state of UP.⁸⁰ Yet the bureaucracy in HP operates in a manner entirely distinct from its more prominent neighbor. Beneath an otherwise unremarkable exterior, a distinct set of norms operate within public agencies of Himachal Pradesh that closely approximate the deliberative model detailed above.

The first stream of evidence for the presence of deliberative norms within the education bureaucracy comes from the interactions between senior officials and lower ranking bureaucrats. One of the most striking observations that came out of interviews and participant observation with the education bureaucracy was the value senior officials placed on the input and participation of their subordinates. During one of my earliest interviews, a senior bureaucrat stationed in the Secretariat in Shimla pointed out to me in telling fashion: “If you want to learn anything at all, you must talk to the block [official]. Though even the district is important, it’s really your block officials who understand what is happening in the field.”⁸¹ The same view was expressed many times over the course of my fieldwork. State planners belonging to the IAS and upper echelons of the state civil service urged me to seek input from local officials who were much closer to the ground. Even more than district-level administration, they emphasized the importance of block-level administration, the lowest subdivision of the state. Whereas in other states, officials equated “local” administration with the district, officials in Himachal Pradesh were careful to distinguish between the two. As a former Director of Education for Himachal Pradesh explained:

*When it comes to administration, the block is most effective. Even though the district is also important, if your block isn’t functional, then education won’t work. Each block covers more than 100 primary schools. Meanwhile in a district you have 1,000 schools, which is too much to monitor and manage. So if the block administration receives appropriate attention, then you get a real boost. What I found is that the district can only compile and disseminate information. When something is needed at the primary school, the local [citizen] will first go to the block. Even if I [the Director of Education] were contacted directly, I would still rely on the block administration for support. The real knowledge of what is happening rests with the Block Education Officer. He knows his school catchment area better than anyone else.*⁸²

To the officials serving within HP’s education bureaucracy, the quote above reflects little more than common sense. Because the lowest rungs of the state are closest to the ground and interact regularly with school teachers and common citizens, they are in the best position to know about what is happening within the primary school system, and should thus be granted the authority and support to respond to inquiries and make decisions. Yet the same understanding was not shared by officials in the other states examined in his study, who felt the need to maintain rigid hierarchical boundaries and viewed block-level officials as little more than underlings of district administration.

The importance that senior officials in HP attached to the participation of subordinates was further reflected in local planning meetings. Consider one such meeting I attended in Shimla. Mr. Dhiman, a senior development officer invited his block-level associates to discuss any challenges that had come up while implementing and monitoring various development projects. One block official described a recent problem in his area. Funds for a new school classroom had been

⁸⁰ Interviews with IAS officials in Himachal Pradesh, UP and New Delhi revealed a common belief that a position within the UP IAS cadre offered a major advantage for career mobility.

⁸¹ Interview with senior official, State Project Office, SSA, Shimla District, July 03, 2008.

⁸² Interview with former Director of Education, Himachal Pradesh, July 16, 2008.

sanctioned, but construction had not commenced for more than six months afterwards. Soon after the room was finally built, the structure fell apart and it was discovered that a cheap quality cement mixture had been used.

After hearing the full story, Mr. Dhiman engaged the group in a conversation to determine the ideal response to the situation. Over the course of a healthy exchange, a number of block officials repeatedly raised the concern that “*formal proceedings will take too long!*” Others pointed out the risk of local political inference in the judicial process. Instead, the block officials felt it was better to work around the judicial system. They decided to act in concert against the concerned builders, as well as any others whom they suspected might be involved in delinquency. They would keep each other informed about such cases in the future and prevent the actors from receiving future contracts in their respective blocks. By encouraging the block officials to discuss practical problems in the field and work collectively to solve them, Mr. Dhiman was effectively promoting deliberative norms in the governance process. Moreover, the content of deliberations reflected the willingness of officials to cooperate across organizational divisions and even work around the legal system.

One might suppose that the collective participation of block officials was unique to local administration in Shimla District. Because these officials were based in the capital district of Himachal Pradesh, perhaps they received more attention from senior colleagues than would normally have been the case in other districts. To probe the matter further, I sought the experiences of officials who had been posted outside of Shimla. As a first point worth noting, virtually none of the bureaucrats I interviewed had spent their entire careers in one district, let alone in the capital district. Over the course of a normal career, officials would spend at most two-three years working in one particular district, after which time they would be transferred to a new position elsewhere.

Notwithstanding the physical proximity to departmental headquarters in the Secretariat, local officials found the bureaucracy in Shimla no better or worse than in other districts. In fact, almost all the officials I interviewed in Shimla had spent the early, formative years of their careers in other districts. Take the case of Mr. Dhiman, the senior development official who ran the meeting described above. Prior to gaining a position in Shimla’s district administration, Mr. Dhiman had spent his entire career moving around different districts outside of Shimla. It was during his earlier stints that he learned the value of establishing strong lines of communication with his subordinates. Among his most memorable experiences was as an assistant to the District Magistrate, the highest ranking local official, in Lahaul-Spiti, a tribal district that borders Kashmir and China. Due to severe climate conditions in the winter months, Lahaul-Spiti is practically cut off from the rest of Himachal Pradesh for six months out of the year. Yet even in this far-flung district, local agencies encouraged the participation of block officials. As Mr. Dhiman explained, their input was critical for understanding the realities of implementation on the ground:

When I was stationed in Lahaul-Spiti much of my time was spent with my team of BDOs [Block Development Officers]. Major government programs for infrastructure, employment and public services had been introduced in Lahaul-Spiti. Large stakes were involved and issues of accountability came up. To monitor so many programs, I could not ignore the concerns of block officers. I kept in constant touch with them and pulled them together to learn and discuss what was happening. I came to learn all the pressures they faced from the gram pradhan and MLA [Member of Legislative Assembly], including the pressure to misutilize funds...I realized that we had to work together, because public services are only effective when you know the needs and aspirations of everyone, even the officer sitting in the remotest corner of the district.

As this official described, the value placed on the participation of subordinates was tied to the notion of effective governance, particularly in the face of severe administrative constraints and political pressures.

To be sure, senior officials in Himachal Pradesh held no rosy image of their junior colleagues. Much like their counterparts in other states, they expressed concerns regarding low motivation, incompetence and indifference among the lower ranks. As another senior official who spent several years as a District Magistrate across the state explained:

The quality of the block officials will vary depending on the person. Sometimes you get a young, highly educated officer who has the zeal to work. Or you can get those who have come up the ranks by promotion, guys who are lethargic and just sitting on retirement age. So really it is a mixed bag. But as the DM [District Magistrate] it is up to you set the example and guide the people you have.

Faced with the same human resource issues at the lower rungs of the bureaucracy that exist in other states, senior officials in Himachal Pradesh nevertheless expressed the need to encourage the participation of their subordinates and coordinate efforts with them across the hierarchy.

Further evidence for the prevalence of deliberative norms come from even further down the ranks of the education bureaucracy. As part of my fieldwork, I observed local education officials carry out day-to-day activities, such as teacher training and the routine monitoring of schools. Consider the example presented earlier of Govindji, the block-level official based in Shimla who had helped develop a schooling program for migrant children from Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. A Sanskrit scholar, Govindji spent more than two decades as a primary school teacher before being promoted to Block Resource Coordinator (BRC) for Shimla's Mashobra region. As part of his charge to provide academic support to school teachers within Mashobra, Govindji ran training sessions at the Block Resource Center, along with onsite training at designated primary schools. I had the opportunity to attend his training sessions at primary schools near Kota, a small town outside of Shimla proper. The lectures he delivered on group-based teaching methods were in many ways no different from the rote, textbook-style of teacher training that I had observed in other places. It was Govindji's informal interactions with teachers outside the classroom, however, that shed light on prevailing norms within the local education bureaucracy.

The new school year had only recently begun and during one of several breaks for *chai*, Govindji went around asking the teachers about their experiences at the start of the year. A few teachers smiled and answered politely that everything so far had progressed fine. The mood quickly changed, however, when a young teacher with a troubled look on his face began to rehearse the story of two children living within his school's catchment area.⁸³ Sunil and Anil, brothers aged eight and nine respectively, came from a poor family of landless tenant farmers. Poor health and malnutrition had kept them out of school for a few years and the teacher was at pains to figure out how to re-enroll the boys in primary school. Govindji listened patiently to the story and at the end suggested the teacher visit the boys' home and inform their parents about the Midday Meal Program and other policy incentives that might persuade them to reconsider sending the pair to school.

⁸³ The catchment area for a school is comprised of habitations located within at least a kilometer distance from the school.

Later that week, I came across the same young teacher again at the Block Resource Centre in Mashobra, where he had come to collect textbooks and teaching materials. I listened intently as Govindji asked him for an update on Sunil and Anil. The teacher went on to describe his experience of visiting their home and learning that they suffered from physical disabilities and had acute difficulty speaking. Govindji encouraged the teacher to get in touch with Prerna, a local NGO that specialized in helping disabled children overcome barriers to learning. With Govindji's guidance and local NGO support, the school teacher was able to enroll the boys in a remedial education program. Contrary to the popular portrayal of bureaucrats in India shirking their duties, the example illustrates how norms that foster deliberation encourage local officials to identify local needs and coordinate efforts in response.

It was in a similar manner that Govindji came to learn about the migrant children from Rajasthan and UP living near construction sites where their parents worked. While he would often see the children along his route to work, it was only after soliciting the support of a local primary school headmaster that he was able to conduct a proper round of monitoring within the area. Together, they identified thirty-six migrant children who had not enrolled in primary school. Govindji and the headmaster took turns narrating the story to me:

We tried convincing their parents to send them to school, but they were not willing to. Some were worried about what would happen if they had to move to another worksite and their children could no longer attend the school. We tried hard to persuade them, even offering the SSA incentives from the government, like scholarships and free uniforms, but none of it worked.⁸⁴

Seeing that the parents were unconvinced, Govindji and the school master approached Mr. Negi, a more senior bureaucrat who was the Additional District Magistrate (ADM) at the time. He contacted the District Superintendent of Police (SPD) and inquired as to whether local law enforcement could help Govindji and the school principal persuade the migrant families to send their children to school. The SPD responded to Mr. Negi's request and local police in the end proved helpful:

On the SPD's recommendation we went to the local police precinct and asked for their help. A senior officer came with us to the worksite and told the parents that it was illegal not to enroll their children in school and that they were committing a crime. People are naturally fearful of the uniform [vardi] and so the parents gave in and agreed to enroll the children.

I later had the opportunity to meet Mr. Negi and learn about his experiences working in local district administration. As the ADM in charge of law and order his responsibility was to help ensure the smooth running of the legal system within the district. From the sea of legal files scattered throughout his office I could tell it was a demanding job. Primary education policy was outside the scope of his official duties, yet he made the effort to contact his counterparts in law enforcement, who normally do not work with the Department of Elementary Education. Mr. Negi described to me how his superiors encouraged him from early on in his career to coordinate with colleagues across divisions and maintain routine contact with his subordinates. Through his experience working as ADM in Shimla and before that in Chamba District, one of the more economically

⁸⁴ Interview with Block Resource Coordinator and primary school headmaster, Mashobra Block, Shimla District, July 30, 2008.

deprived regions of Himachal Pradesh, he came to internalize the deliberative norms governing the bureaucracy. As he explained:

One positive point I have seen over the last twenty years is that, when I started in 1986, poor ladies and chaps wouldn't come to my office for help. There was a hesitation in people to work with state agencies. But over time we learned that if you deprive dalits, women or any weaker section of access to basic rights, then you cannot achieve overall development...I've learned this from watching the example of my seniors. If my senior officer shuns people away from his office then naturally that will shape how I do things. Those I worked under encouraged me to stay in close touch with my subordinates and keep my doors open to people. So I think that's a major sign of good governance. That is where it starts.⁸⁵

The learning process Mr. Negi described was reiterated by other local bureaucrats. They had learned how to approach their work, over time, by observing colleagues and senior officials within the hierarchy. Sometimes the learning process was quite explicit, as in the case of planning meetings. In those formal settings, senior officials would ask subordinates to participate and provide information about conditions on the ground. In other instances, the process was less formal, like in the case of Mr. Chauhan, who helped develop the mobile school program for children belonging to the nomadic Gujjar tribe that I described in the motivating vignette.

The value placed on participation and local knowledge within the bureaucracy is further reflected in official documents and planning reports. In a recent development report produced by the Planning Department of Himachal Pradesh to help inform the government's Five Year Plan, an entire chapter is devoted to "People's Participation." In it, the report emphasizes the importance of devoting administrative efforts to conduct training courses, exposure visits, panchayat and NGO capacity building efforts, and even local-level *melas* (festivals) in collaboration with civic agencies, all done "to spread the concept of people's participation in development planning."⁸⁶ One must of course exercise caution in taking official reports at their literal word, as the gap between rhetoric and reality can be great. Taken alone, such statements may not mean much. However, combined with interviews of public officials, direct observations as well as the accounts of citizens and civic agencies on the ground, these documents provide supportive evidence for the bureaucracy's commitment to promoting participation.

3.4.2. Outside the State

The second major stream of evidence for the presence of deliberative norms comes from the experiences and understandings of Himachali citizens and civic agencies working at the grassroots level. Civil society has occupied an important place in India's social development. Within the field of primary education, a number of civic organizations emerged out of the central government's efforts to expand literacy.⁸⁷ India's education policies during the late 1980s and 1990s sought to tackle rural illiteracy through a variety of community-based initiatives. Given weak administrative

⁸⁵ Interview with Additional District Magistrate, Shimla, August 7, 2008.

⁸⁶ Excerpt taken from Himachal Pradesh State Development Report (Planning Commission 2005: 259)

⁸⁷ The NGO sector has grown even more rapidly in recent years under generous financing by various state and non-state agencies. On the relationship between Indian civil society and development policy, see Jenkins (2005; 2010).

capacity within the state and other practical difficulties in reaching rural communities, these programs relied on local, voluntary organization for support. More recently, the administrative framework outlined under India's primary education policy calls for greater participation from non-state actors, including NGOs and local communities, throughout the implementation process. With the creation of Village Education Committees (VECs), parents are encouraged to participate in areas like school enrollment, the provision of the Midday Meal, the provision and routine maintenance of school infrastructure and other inputs, including the hiring of para-teachers.

Consider the case of Himachal Gyan Vigyan Samiti (HGVS), among the major civil society organizations to evolve out of these programs. HGVS is a branch of a larger umbrella organization known as Bharata Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS), a nationwide movement to empower marginalized citizens through literacy and scientific knowledge. BGVS was sponsored by the National Literacy Mission of 1987, one of the central government's major policies to expand functional literacy among adults. The organization has more than 300,000 members, with local units based in 350 districts across twenty-three states.⁸⁸ The success of Kerala's literacy programs, which were implemented by Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parisad (KSSP), a pioneering branch of BGVS, drew national attention and encouraged the National Literacy Mission to strengthen the participation of civic actors in other states as well, including Himachal Pradesh. Formally registered in 1991, today HGVS has an organizational presence in 45 administrative blocks spread across all 12 districts of the state. Its network of around 50,000 members includes service professionals (e.g. school teachers, doctors and scientists), social activists, rural youth, and even officers belonging to different state departments.

HGVS is organized into committees at the level of the state, district, block and village panchayat and adheres to democratic organizational norms, holding elections each year for committee leadership positions.⁸⁹ Like the KSSP in Kerala, HGVS helped to spearhead literacy campaigns in Himachal Pradesh. The state provided HGVS the mandate to oversee the State Resource Centre (SRC) for literacy, the nodal agency in charge of carrying out adult literacy and vocational skill development programs across the state. While fieldworkers within HGVS tend to downplay the impact of the adult literacy program, it provided an opportunity to spread the message about state efforts to expand education and establish local ties within villages, opening people's receptivity to the state. The notion that "*I may be illiterate, but my child does not have to be*" was a sentiment often expressed by parents to HGVS fieldworkers during the literacy program.⁹⁰ Through its grassroots network and ties with the state, HGVS would convey such popular sentiments to officials within the Department of Education. A highly decorated senior bureaucrat, who had spent many years overseeing primary education, explained how state officials began working with HGVS:

*Many people want to downplay the role of the NLM [National Literacy Mission] program, since it was immediately succeeded by SSA [Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan], which is a World Bank program. Sure SSA has had a big impact, but the NLM program was not chasing targets. It helped to build institutions that tied the bureaucracy to people out in the field, and these are still around. We achieved this with support from organizations like Himachal's branch of BGVS. Bureaucrats in departments like Forestry and Education became involved with Himachal Gyan Vigan Samiti and they saw the benefits of working with local people and institutions.*⁹¹

⁸⁸ BGVS Website: <http://www.bgvs.org/index.php/program>.

⁸⁹ Internal documents and interviews with officers, HGVS, Shimla.

⁹⁰ Multiple interviews and focus group discussions with fieldworkers, HGVS, Shimla.

⁹¹ Interview with retired IAS officer, Shimla, July 18, 2008.

By working with organizations like HGVS to identify public needs, the Himachali state was effectively granting authority to citizens. Yet the sharing of authority also invited conflict. In carrying out its mission to provide the public information regarding governmental policies, the organization often found itself on the frontlines of public anger. On numerous occasions over the course of fieldwork, I observed HGVS activists holding rallies and protests in District Shimla, sometimes outside of government offices. In working with the state to promote public participation, members of HGVS viewed these conflicts as par for the course. As an official within the governing body noted:

What makes us different from other NGOs is that we work with the government but also put pressure on the government. Actually, we do not even like to call ourselves a 'NGO', but instead a mass-membership organization. We work in the field but are also engaged directly with the state... Sometimes we have had conflict but overall the state has been open to our support. And our participation within the state has grown so much that by now not one state government committee or program can avoid us. We must be included in any policy committee at the state level.⁹²

The blend of engagement and conflict between the state and civic agencies is a common feature of participatory governance. As Heller (2001) describes in the case of the KSSP's work in Kerala, for example, the organization occupied a dual role, on the one hand enabling the state to reach citizens in policy efforts, while at the same time stoking popular protest around particular policies and government agencies. The fact that HGVS activists understand their engagement with the state along similar terms suggests that deliberative norms involve more than the exchange of information, but the sharing of authority as well.

The benefits of encouraging greater local participation become clear when considering the challenges of implementing primary education across such a large, diverse territory like the hill region. Even with the expanded resources under SSA, it would be impossible for bureaucrats to visit every school, let alone solve local challenges as and when they arise. According to one official, "If we can achieve even seventy percent of our monitoring target, we find that good."⁹³ Given weak administrative capacity, civic agencies provides a resource for local bureaucrats to draw upon when conducting routine tasks, such as identifying out of school children and motivating parents to participate in school committees. They also provide feedback on how far primary education policies are reaching local communities. A senior official, who volunteered with HGVS during the literacy movement, and rose through the local bureaucracy to eventually become the State Project Director for SSA, described his personal experience of working with civic agencies:

During the literacy movement of the 1990s, I traveled to all parts of the state. I went to schools and interviewed teachers. I don't think it succeeded in getting people literate, but indirectly, it helped create a space for primary schooling. When I was posted in districts throughout the state, we learned to work with [local groups] to understand the public's demands and what needs were unfulfilled, especially the need to educate girls... In that way, broad participation has helped to ensure the bureaucracy knows what is happening on the ground. A system of quick feedback also makes it

⁹² Interview with senior officer, HGVS, Shimla, July 25, 2008.

⁹³ Interview with senior official, District Project Office, SSA, Shimla, March 5, 2010.

*easier to keep the local bureaucrats accountable, though sometimes it leads to very petty kinds of interference. But in the end, that may not be a bad thing at all.*⁹⁴

As he and others pointed out, encouraging civil society participation carries both benefits and costs. On the one hand, it provides the state access to local knowledge and participation from local communities. At the same time, societal groups can challenge the authority of state and it can be difficult for local agencies to meet their demands. Public officials in Himachal Pradesh embrace both sides of the deliberative coin.

3.5. Nested Cases of Implementation

Having established above the presence of deliberative norms within the state, I now turn to showing how they drive policy implementation outcomes in Himachal Pradesh. The cases are drawn from fieldwork conducted at the level of the state, district and village. I begin with school planning and infrastructure development at the state-level. Next, I examine the local monitoring process, and in particular, the role of women's groups (*mahila mandals*) that have been adopted by the state in the form of Mother Teacher Associations (MTAs). The analysis then moves down to the village-level, where I test further the mechanisms of my theory. In two separate village case studies. The first case study analyzes the positive implementation outcomes primary education in the least-likely setting of Dharmaur, a poor, predominantly lower caste village outside of Shimla. It demonstrates how deliberative norms within the state help foster and sustain local collective action in an otherwise unlikely setting. The second village case study of Kandhar Ghat analyzes poor implementation in a relatively affluent, predominantly upper caste village located in the Apple Belt, a region that has undergone rapid economic growth and privatization. The case helps press the limits of the deliberative model, and in particular, identifies the importance of social cohesion.

3.5.1. Participatory Planning

In this section I present findings on school infrastructure planning and development. A striking feature of the Himachali state is how participatory and broadly consultative the planning process is, not only for primary education but other policy domains as well.⁹⁵ In formal terms, the planning process in Himachal Pradesh appears no different from that of other states. Like other Indian states, planning in Himachal Pradesh is centrally administered through a State Planning Board, which is headed by the Secretary of Planning, a senior bureaucrat. Individual departments like Elementary Education submit their separate work plans and receive feedback and recommendations.

In practice, however, the planning process in HP involves far more than the centralized formulation of state plans. Informal "working group" meetings take place between the State Planning Board and individual departments wherein officials discuss the practical hurdles that local agencies face in providing public services. During these meetings state planners gain access to field-

⁹⁴ Interview with senior official, Department of Elementary Education, Himachal Pradesh, July 1, 2008.

⁹⁵ Multiple interviews with state planners, elected representatives and members of civil society.

based knowledge regarding policy implementation, which allows them to tailor development plans to better suit the varying needs of communities across the state. As one senior planning official explained:

The participatory planning process has been very helpful overall. We have been able to allocate funds and policies based on area specific, local needs. Actually I can make a bold statement that we have made a clear shift from directive planning to more interactive planning, because there has been a great deal of flexibility given to the departments. They can come back to us with their issues and then also consult with the legislative side.⁹⁶

These informal discussions help set the agenda for formal planning meetings. Importantly, participatory planning in Himachal Pradesh is not just limited to interactions between state planners and line departments. Along with bureaucrats, elected Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and civic agencies are encouraged to participate in the planning process as well. Public officials I interviewed see the engagement with elected representatives and civic agencies as essential for ensuring that the planning process is responsive to the needs of citizens.⁹⁷ As another senior bureaucrat in the Planning Department described to me:

The level of consultation is a unique feature of planning here that you don't find in India. We convene regular meetings with public representatives. We request the MLAs to share their priorities and other information about their constituents' needs that would be relevant for planning. Before coming to these meetings, we ask MLAs to discuss with their constituents and local administrators at the district, block and panchayat level what they need.⁹⁸

State planners in HP find it beneficial to work with elected representatives, who can provide input on the needs facing their local constituents. The participatory approach helps address the varying geographic and socioeconomic conditions across the state.

Turning more specifically to the domain of primary education policy, consider how participatory planning has shaped school infrastructure development. According to India's SSA policy framework, and more recently, the Right to Education Act, every village should have access to a primary school within certain specified norms regarding school distance and child population size. The criteria prescribed by the central government are a maximum of 1 km distance from a village to build a primary school and 3 km for a middle school. Given the varying conditions across India, state governments are afforded the opportunity to adjust these criteria to better suit the needs of their populations.

Over the course of many formal and informal meetings, state planners in Himachal Pradesh identified the limitations of working within the official norms handed down by New Delhi. In light of the geography and settlement patterns within the hills, they chose to relax the official criteria, a decision that reflected an understanding of the conditions facing hill communities across the state. As it was declared in a planning report submitted to the central government:

⁹⁶ Interview with official, Planning Department, Himachal Pradesh, June 28, 2008.

⁹⁷ Multiple interviews with state officials across departments.

⁹⁸ Interview with senior official, Planning Department, Himachal Pradesh, July 14, 2008.

[I]t is felt that the distance norm prescribed by the Government of India does not reflect the actual picture in the hilly terrain, as the real distance covered in hilly areas is much more, as the habitations are scattered. Unlike in the plains, one to three km in a hilly terrain often means climbing down one ridge and climbing up another and/or crossing a rivulet. All this twice a day is not easy for elementary school-going children. Hence it is felt that the government of Himachal Pradesh should formulate its own policy of providing accessibility of schools keeping the hilly terrain in mind.⁹⁹

The decision to adapt the technical criteria for building new schools would seem little more than common sense to officials in Himachal Pradesh. Such adaptations were necessary to meet the objective of school expansion in the harsh physical environment of the hill region. Yet they reflected the underlying value that public agencies placed on local knowledge in the implementation process.

The negotiation around official policy for school planning and development did not end there. Public agencies at the local-level would deliberate further, in conjunction with elected officials and civic groups, to determine where new schools needed to be built. Although state planners had modified the criteria for new schools to better suit the hill population, local public officials would break even those, more relaxed, requirements. Take for example the primary school that had been constructed in Shalai. A tiny habitation comprised of only eighteen families, Shalai was the last place one might expect to find a primary school. To reach the village from the local education bureaucracy in Shimla involved an hour and half long journey by bus, followed by an hour long hike down a steep ravine.

When visiting the primary school in Shalai, I was surprised to find more staff than students. The school had two teachers and a cook for the Midday Meal, all of whom catered to the two children who were enrolled. Both students were in school the day I visited, along with a third child who was actually of pre-primary age, just big enough to fit into the free uniform that was provided by the state under SSA. Shalai's primary school had been built in 1998. Around that time, enrollment was significantly higher, approximately 16 children according to the head teacher. A highly active women's association within the village, which had been working on adult literacy under the guidance of HGVS, helped organize families in Shalai to collectively demand local agencies to build a primary school within the village. Prior to that, children from the village had to travel 4km uphill to reach nearest school. Parents in the village were particularly concerned for small children, who could not easily make the journey. Yet even with a population of 16 children, a primary school that covered grades 1-5 implied only three children per grade.

In a matter of only ten years, the child population in Shalai dwindled ever further, as families had fewer children and some even left the village to reside closer to Shimla proper. Both parents and school teachers feared that local agencies might shut down the school. During routine monitoring visits, local officials came to learn about the low student enrollment at the school, and even warned the school headmaster that enrollment was too low to justify a primary school. Curious as to how a school continued to operate with only two students and three staff members, I met with the gram pradhan of the panchayat. He shared in my amazement:

⁹⁹ Excerpt taken from Himachal Pradesh State Development Report (Planning Commission 2005: 139).

Even we are all pleasantly surprised to see the school is still running. The Department [of Education] told us that the school was in good standing but that they could not send us additional teachers because the enrollment was too low. So we put funds together from the panchayat to hire an extra teacher for one year.

The provision of primary schools for habitations with such tiny child populations clearly violated official norms. Yet not only have such schools persisted in Himachal Pradesh, local agencies continue to propose new ones. For officials in the education bureaucracy, the flouting of official rules is understood to be a normal part of addressing community needs. Over many lengthy conversations with local officials in Shimla, I raised the issue of infrastructure expansion and how “need” was understood, particularly in relation to official rules regarding school provision. By and large, they expressed the view that “need” was not defined by the rules, but by local conditions. As one official explained:

Our mission is to ensure that every village should have a primary school as far as possible. With a very scattered population, travel over long distance poses a challenge. No student should have to walk more than 1-1.5 km to reach a primary school...And in some places, we've opened primary schools even for five students, like if there's a glacier point or unbridgeable river or stream that can't be crossed in the monsoons. We take the view that we should open special schools there, even if it is just for five students.

The urge to carry out the mission of universal primary education, even when doing so violated official rules, may give one the impression that public officials in Himachal Pradesh are somehow intrinsically motivated to go beyond the call of duty. Indeed, over the course of fieldwork, I would hear countless times that people in the hill region were naturally more “god fearing” than society in the plains, and that officials were more inclined to carry out their duties, even when no one was watching. Yet infrastructure development in Himachal Pradesh was not characterized by a close adherence to official duty. To the contrary, public officials were largely engaged in collective rule-breaking. In fact, many officials expressed to me privately the concern that local agencies were accorded too much flexibility and that an excess of rules and regulations had been broken along the way. According to a senior IAS officer who once served as the Secretary of Education for the state:

Schools have been opened where there is some need but not too much need...Often this has been done without any proper planning or compliance with official norms. And now you cannot close schools once they are already opened, otherwise you get agitations from the public.

Others I spoke with expressed a related concern that policy implementation had fallen prey to local politics, and as a result, school expansion had become “haphazard” and needed to be “rationalized” through tighter rules. Evidence that officials in Himachal Pradesh were intrinsically more motivated to go beyond the call of duty, especially in comparison to their counterparts in other states, was difficult to establish. Residents of the adjacent hill state of Uttarakhand were no less keen to describe themselves as “god fearing,” and yet bureaucrats there had a very different notion of what their public duty required.

Rather than deliberative norms, might it be that officials in HP's education bureaucracy was simply responding to local political pressures? Upon closer inspection, it would not be unfair to characterize the process of educational planning in Himachal Pradesh as clientelist. The local demands that public agencies are exposed can be characterized as political. Whether it was to

identify the location for constructing a new school building, appointing additional staff, or even upgrade existing facilities, public officials were subject to local political interference. Many officials themselves characterized the system as patronage-based, involving a lengthy chain of political influence from the state legislator down to the panchayat pradhan. As one senior bureaucrat put it:

With this whole decentralization push, we find pradhans have become thekedars [contractors]. A huge kind of a network has emerged in terms of contractorship, for the school building and other facilities. Then for appointing the school teacher and cooking staff, again it provides opportunities to dispense patronage... That is how communities are involved in school development. That is what you call a demand or need based system.¹⁰⁰

The official's description accords with what I observed at the village-level. In Shalai, for example, the women's association was quick to have the village pradhan appoint one of its members as a cook in the primary school when the Midday Meal program started running in 2002. Soon thereafter, the group pressed the local education bureaucracy to have a kitchen shed built in the school.

While I cannot reject the hypothesis that political pressures may have helped sustain the deliberative practices within the state, to characterize the implementation process as clientelist does not adequately capture the nature of relationships between bureaucrats and citizens. The notion that public bureaucracies can work collectively to advance programmatic goals like universal primary education while submitting to particularistic demands runs against the expectations of the literature on clientelism and democracy within India. This literature tends to presume that clientelism necessarily undermines the universal provision of public goods and services, particularly in light of caste and other social divisions that prevail in India's Hindi belt (Chandra 2004; Keefer and Khemani 2004; Stokes, Dunning et al. 2013).

In the face of a clientelistic system, it is through the tight observance of formal rules and procedures that bureaucracies exert autonomy, protecting themselves from political interference. Yet in the education bureaucracy of Himachal Pradesh, I find that prevailing norms led local officials to break the rules and draw input from non-state actors in school planning and development. Political interference was embraced as a way of identifying "needs." As a senior official who helped lead the SSA State Project Office explained:

Elected leaders can be very effective in connecting us to people on the ground. Some might see that as interference, but what is 'interference'? It is just a word. In the end, the MLA is a public representative and we must seek them out to understand the people's voice on the ground. And they too have to cooperate with the bureaucracy to get things done.¹⁰¹

To be sure, public officials also had problems with political interference. With the expansion of schooling across the state, the education bureaucracy was increasingly overrun by particularistic demands. For example, MLAs and other local politicians would push for new schools, especially around election time, inserting themselves in the decision-making process regarding the placement and transfer of school teachers.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Interview with senior official, Department of Education, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Principal Secretary, Rural Development, July 15, 2008.

¹⁰² Senior officials in Himachal Pradesh have written on patronage politics and the problem of politically-motivated teacher transfers within the primary school system. See for example: Sood (2003) and Sanan (2004).

These sorts of problems notwithstanding, however, the participation of the public was understood by bureaucrats as the appropriate way to identify needs and carry out the task of education planning. In some cases, elected leaders would assist the bureaucracy without interfering much at all. As one MLA from the Congress Party in Shimla pointed out:

*Whenever there is an issue in the village primary school we stay alert to the activities of the PTA [Parent Teacher Association] and panchayat pradhan. They tell us their problems and we can even contact the CM [Chief Minister], but more often we have them contact the concerned departments. SSA is providing resources that they can access directly, and by now I would say that most are capable of making demands on their own... Parties come and go with each election, so it doesn't matter whether it is a Congress or BJP-led government. In the end, they have to work with the administration.*¹⁰³

Even in a “patronage democracy” like India’s, where both politicians and citizens view state resources as a means to further their personal ends, policy implementation within HP sheds light on how bureaucratic actors can mediate clientelistic processes.¹⁰⁴ Deliberative norms encourage bureaucrats to identify opportunities to coordinate implementation with elected leaders who they may otherwise prefer to ignore or avoid.

Beyond infrastructure, the participatory approach to planning in Himachal Pradesh has yielded other context-specific adaptations to improve the delivery of primary schooling. They have led, for example, to the adoption of special educational sub-plans for interior regions that are difficult to access, as well as for tribal populations like the Gujjars and other marginalized groups who tend to be neglected by the state. Take for example the development of the annual academic calendar. The varying altitudes and topography of the Himalayan region creates great disparities in climate conditions across HP. Some regions of the state experience weather patterns more akin to the plains while other parts can get snowed in for several months at a time, making it very difficult for children to attend school on a regular basis. In addition, children tend to help their families with agricultural labor and other domestic chores, especially during peak harvest months, which places stress on school attendance.

To address regional variation in climate and agricultural seasons, the Department of Elementary Education has created academic calendars specific to each region within the state. Local district administration is provided further flexibility to make adjustments to the school calendar based on prevailing weather patterns and agricultural seasons. The state’s ability to plan for something as mundane as climate may not seem worthy of mention. Yet such moves are rare within India’s highly centralized education system. Public agencies in adjacent provinces like Uttar Pradesh, for example, have tended to overlook these aspects of education planning. By making simple, yet critical, local adjustments to policy, like the flexible school calendar, public agencies in Himachal Pradesh have helped mitigate regional disparities in primary school attendance.

¹⁰³ Interview with MLA, Congress Party, March 6, 2010.

¹⁰⁴ The characterization of India as a patronage democracy has been made forcefully by Chandra (2004). Although she examines the role of patronage ties through the lens of the ethnic party system in Uttar Pradesh, even in states like Himachal Pradesh where caste identities have not been so politicized, patronage networks remain a primary means through which citizens access the state, which raises the following question: Why does patronage democracy reinforce exclusionary tendencies within some states while facilitating the implementation of universal policies like primary schooling in others?

3.5.2. Mother-Teacher Associations and Local Monitoring

Among the most interesting and distinctive features of policy implementation within Himachal Pradesh has been the ability of traditionally marginalized groups to make collective demands on public agencies. In the case of primary education, women's groups have played a critical role in collectively monitoring the delivery of services. Yet the question of how the state has been able to evoke and sustain their participation, and why village women's groups have been much more effective in monitoring primary education in Himachal Pradesh as compared to other north Indian states, has not been explored. In this section I demonstrate how public officials in Himachal Pradesh help foster the participation of women's groups in collective monitoring primary education.

Much has been written about women's associations in India's Himalayan Region. Whereas today the creation of such associations, particularly in the form of Self Help Groups (SHGs), has become a matter of public policy throughout India, the development of women's association within Himachal Pradesh was often informal and organic. Known as *mahila mandals*, these groups have a long history of working at the village level, effectively organizing around a wide range of issues, including the management of forest resources, water and sanitation, women's justice and early childcare.¹⁰⁵ In some parts of Himachal Pradesh, they have even formed activist networks that cut across caste and class differences to address women's rights and other critical social issues. For instance, a voluntary organization known as SUTRA (The Social for Social Uplift through Rural Action) has helped organize a number of pilgrimages (*padayatra*s) by women's groups across the state to Shimla, where they have led agitations around public policies facing women, including domestic violence laws, the sale of liquor and pension schemes for single women.

The active participation of women's associations in Himachal Pradesh in part reflects the significant role played by women in the rural economy and society across the Himayalan region. They perform the bulk of agricultural work and participate in household decision-making, particularly in areas of child health and education. Their contribution to these and other policy domains also reflects efforts taken by the Himachali state. Public agencies take a keen interest in working with women's associations and have even tried promoting them further at the village level. As a senior official working in the Department of Rural Development explained:

We have found the mahila mandals quite helpful in our Total Sanitation Campaign. Also we have seen them work against alcoholism and other social issues in the village. They are active within the community and we try to rope them in more and more.

The active participation of women's associations is perhaps most evident in the sphere of primary education. According to the PROBE report, which compared the state of primary education across north India, these, largely *informal*, women's groups have been even more effective in collectively monitoring their local primary schools than formal institutions like village panchayats and Village

¹⁰⁵ For an extensive discussion on women's village associations in Himachal Pradesh, see Berry (1997). On the role of women's village associations in natural resource management and other areas of development, see the following studies: (Davidson-Hunt 1995; Bingeman, Berkes et al. 2004; Mendhapurkar 2004; Bandooni, Negi et al. 2005; Agrawal and Chhatre 2006).

Education Committees (PROBE Team 1999). Development experts have also pointed out their impact on student attendance and delivery of the Midday Meal program.¹⁰⁶

In light of their contributions, women's groups in Himachal Pradesh have been granted official recognition and authority over primary schooling through the creation of Mother Teacher Associations (MTAs). The Himachali state's ability to recognize the importance of women and provide a space for them to participate in the education system reflects underlying norms that encourage officials to incorporate local knowledge into the implementation process. According to a senior official in the SSA State Project Office:

*Over the course of the [school] expansion across the state, we found that women contribute more to the primary schools. The gents are distant, either busy working or doing something else. But the women are empowered and show more concern on a day-to-day basis...Even far into the interior areas, like Lahaul and Spiti. There you will find the women most active.*¹⁰⁷

The decision to adopt the MTA structure grew out of informal deliberations within the bureaucracy and between the state and civic agencies like HGVS, who shared experiences working with women's associations in the field with state planners. The education bureaucracy invested in the concept further by having HGVS develop "model" MTAs that could serve as examples for public officials to learn from. As a seasoned fieldworker from HGVS who had contributed to the MTA project recounted:

*We adopted model MTAs in the most backward villages. Over the course of a few years, the MTAs turned their schools around. We showed the [Education] Department what they [the women] are capable of achieving. And it was after seeing it work in a practical way that the government came to embrace the MTA concept.*¹⁰⁸

The decision to institute MTAs within HP should also be seen in light of the fact that most other states in India adhere to the administrative structure outlined by the central government under SSA. As mentioned earlier, according to SSA's administrative prescriptions, the nodal agency for primary schooling at the village-level is the Village Education Committee (VEC), a formal body that is overseen by the pradhan of the gram panchayat. While panchayats and VECs are thought to be more active in Himachal Pradesh as compared to other states, their efforts have largely been restricted to school infrastructure and the expenditure of SSA school grants. As an official within the Education Department explained:

*The VEC was created because of the school grants that must be spent under SSA. So their main focus from the beginning was driven by spending [kbarcha] ...But the MTA is more involved as an actual school committee. They [the women] make sure that the school functions, that children attend and that the food they eat is nutritious. They are more active.*¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Based on their analysis of the data from the PROBE survey, Drèze and Kingdon (2001) find that the presence of women's groups in Himachal Pradesh help explain higher student enrollment and attendance, particularly for girls, as well as better implementation of the state's Midday Meal Program.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with senior official, State Project Office, SSA, Himachal Pradesh, July 8, 2008.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with fieldworker, HGVS, Shimla.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with senior official, State Project Office, SSA, Himachal Pradesh, July 3, 2008.

While recognizing the importance of local democratic institutions like the gram panchayat, public officials in the education bureaucracy also expressed the concern that panchayats may not have the interest or capability of carrying out local monitoring of primary schools. The panchayat pradhan is responsible for implementing numerous other governmental schemes, many of which are more lucrative than primary education.¹¹⁰ As a consequence, issues with service delivery in primary schools can easily get crowded out by other policies and programs. By contrast, the MTA is comprised of concerned mothers and has a very specific objective, which is to ensure the functioning of the primary school.

A more pessimistic view might be that the creation of MTAs was yet another attempt by the state to establish formal agencies without substantive rights. Yet efforts within the education bureaucracy in Himachal Pradesh have gone far beyond just establishing these groups in name. As I observed in Shimla District, local agencies carry out monthly meetings and capacity-building exercises with MTAs at the block level.¹¹¹ Crucially, the local administration made it a priority to ensure that female administrators, including the District Gender Coordinator under SSA, attended these meetings since women were more likely to approach them.¹¹² These engagements allowed for the exchange of ideas and information, giving public officials exposure to problems on the ground, while providing local communities access to the state. As a block-level official explained:

*Our MTAs meet on the seventh of every month. We encourage them to share any message they need to give to the government. They can tell us about school repairs, problems with the Midday Meal, and the teaching at the school. And we also pass along information on government programs and any new schemes that are coming up in education. In that way, we stay connected to local communities and they also maintain ties with the school system.*¹¹³

Consider for example the MTA meetings held in Chiyog, a large panchayat outside of Shimla comprised of many scattered villages. Focus group discussion conducted with five MTAs from the area revealed that their primary schools faced a common problem. School teachers had been arriving late to school by an hour each day. In some of the villages they would arrive more than two hours late, by which time the school children would already be having their midday meal. They MTA members expressed these concerns during meetings, which were attended by local officials and school headmasters. Over the course of their discussions, it emerged that most of the school teachers working in the area took the same bus each day from the town center of Shimla. As the school headmasters explained, the bus from Shimla would often depart late, which led them to miss their connection to another bus that went to Chiyog. Seeing that the bus delay was severely affecting a number of primary schools in Chiyog, officials from the education bureaucracy approached the local transportation agency to discuss the matter. They found common agreement in scheduling the bus to leave Shimla a half hour earlier each morning. Ever since then, the MTA members reported, school teachers have been arriving on time.

The solution identified through the MTA meetings in Chiyog is one ordinary example of how public officials working collectively with women's groups can solve implementation problems

¹¹⁰ Panchayats in Himachal Pradesh exercise control over village infrastructure projects, access to BPL (Below Poverty Line) card and more recently, identification cards for MNREGA, India's national rural employment guarantee scheme.

¹¹¹ I attended one such meeting in Kotkhai Block, where close to 300 women attended to learn about India's Right to Education Act.

¹¹² Interview with local official, SSA, Shimla. March 8, 2010.

¹¹³ Interview, Block Resource Coordinator, SSA, Shimla.

effectively. No less important, however, is the space that such meetings create for women's groups, and local communities more broadly, to learn the practice of citizenship. As MTA members expressed during our focus group discussions, these meetings were among the few opportunities they had to gain outside exposure, discuss issues with groups from other villages and connect directly with public officials. Furthermore, the fact that public officials listened to their experiences and responded with something tangible, helped generate confidence in their own collective capabilities to organize around primary schooling. As one MTA members put it:

*The men [in the village] are always saying to us, "You are all illiterate. What is the purpose of your group?" And we have also asked ourselves that sometimes. But when the teachers started arriving on time, we didn't have to explain anymore. So what if we are not as educated? Our voice also reaches the state.*¹¹⁴

For marginalized citizens, the confidence in knowing that one's voice can reach the state is no small matter. Beyond formal recognition, the practice of expressing local needs and concerns to public officials during MTA meetings has shaped their understanding of how they, as citizens, relate to the state. The women's groups in Chiyog credit their experiences with the local state for helping to strengthen their collective participation in primary schooling. With the participation of women's groups, citizens and local agencies have collectively solved implementation problems on the ground and improved the functioning of primary schools.

3.5.3. Making Primary School Work: The Case of Dharmaur¹¹⁵

The findings so far have shown that deliberative norms lead public agencies to carry out school planning and monitoring activities effectively with the support of civic agencies. To investigate whether and how such norms shape governance further down the chain of implementation, I now present findings from the village-level. As the following case study demonstrates, local public agencies can help foster and sustain collective action, improving the delivery of primary education, even in a least-likely setting.

Dharmaur is a relatively small village (pop. 384) located a few kilometers downhill from a main road connecting Shimla to the rest of Mashobra Block. Despite being situated relatively close to the state capital, socioeconomic conditions in Dharmaur were typical in many respects of more far-flung villages. Families relied primarily on subsistence agriculture and animal husbandry. The main crops were wheat, rice and a few vegetables (e.g. tomato and cabbage), which were grown for household consumption. Proximity to Shimla provided economic opportunities for young men in the village, some of whom earned supplementary income as taxicab drivers. The social composition of Dharmaur was mostly lower caste with notable fragmentation along *jati* (sub-caste) lines. There was a village Devta Committee and a few auspicious sites for honoring the village Devta. However, unlike wealthier villages, the Dharmaur did not have a temple association since residents lacked the

¹¹⁴ Focus Group Discussion, MTA and women's association, Chiyog Panchayat, Shimla.

¹¹⁵ The findings of this case study are based on four weeks of fieldwork in Dharmaur, conducted in February-March 2010. During that time, I lived in rented accommodation nearby the village and visited daily, sometimes staying in the village overnight.

economic wherewithal to construct a temple. For a summary of village indicators, see the Table 3.1. in the chapter Appendix.

I selected Dharmaur as a case study village for several reasons. First, given its small size and considerable hiking distance from a motorable road, it was not a likely place to draw attention from public officials. Nor was it a desirable location for school teachers to seek a posting.¹¹⁶ Second, the economy of Dharmaur reflected the general pattern of subsistence agriculture and small land holdings found across Shimla and other districts of HP, making it less of an exceptional case. And finally, the caste composition of Dharmaur made it an unlikely candidate for local collective action around primary schooling. Education in rural India has long been the province of upper castes, and studies of Indian bureaucracy suggest that public agencies are less responsive the needs of lower caste groups. In addition, the literature on ethnic divisions and public goods suggests that villages that are more fragmented along caste lines are less likely to exhibit collective action around public goods provision. Given the preponderance of lower castes (70%) and fragmentation into five sub-caste groups, the social composition of Dharmaur would seem to pose a major hurdle to local collective action around primary education.

For all the above reasons, Dharmaur presents a least-likely case for primary education to be implemented effectively. To the extent that we find deliberative bureaucratic norms encourage community participation around primary schooling in Dharmaur, we have greater confidence that such norms are likely to produce a similar effect in other villages. To my surprise, I observed high levels community involvement at the local primary school in Dharmaur, which in many respects, was in better condition than schools I had visited in wealthier, upper caste villages. The school building had been newly refurbished, the classrooms were well-lit and the walls were adorned with materials for teaching and learning. The bathrooms were in working order and construction of the kitchen shed for the Midday Meal Program was nearly complete. Based on my direct observations and what parents reported, the two teachers posted at the school arrived to school on time daily, and actually spent time in the classroom teaching. Based on a survey I conducted of households in Dharmaur, all children of primary school going age had enrolled in school and not one had dropped out. Notwithstanding several, relatively inexpensive private school options available nearby, all but one family in the village were sending their children to the government primary school.

According to elders in the village, a women's association emerged in Dharmaur during the late 1980s. At that time, it was an informal group of women from a few households who participated in collective agriculture and labor sharing. The women would come together during harvest season and combine their efforts to collect the harvest. They would also help each other on a more spontaneous basis. For instance, they would all pitch in if one of their families needed help rebuilding their home after a storm. In the mid-1990s, fieldworkers from HGVS began developing a volunteer network in the village focusing on the state's adult literacy program. Volunteers drew much support from the women's association and HGVS helped to get the group registered officially by the end of 1996. By that time, the group had a core membership of approximately twenty-five women from different households, though many more households were connected informally through ties of kinship. The volunteer network established by HGVS helped set up an Adult Literacy Center in Dharmaur and would routinely disseminate newsletters throughout the village on

¹¹⁶ As village studies of primary education in India have shown, larger habitations that are connected to motorable arteries are more likely to be monitored by the local bureaucracy. School teachers tend to prefer such postings as well. See, for example, Drèze and Kingdon (2001).

sustainable agriculture, education, maternal health, and other salient issues. The women's association became the nucleus of the network and HGVS helped guide them on how to address their developmental needs.

The women's association soon expanded its efforts to issues related to child welfare. Members started coming together each year to clear village pathways of dangerous weeds that caused children to slip on their way to school. Under guidance from HGVS volunteers, they also began taking an interest in early child health, disseminating information on the state's immunization campaigns and nutritional programs for infants. When local health workers conducted rounds at the village, women from the group would volunteer to help them identify families requiring assistance with deliveries and neonatal care. A focus on primary schooling was a natural extension of the group's work. Early on when the group was still developing, parents faced many difficulties trying to address problems at the school:

Before the mahila mandal [women's association] became active at the school, nobody raised their voice. The school teachers used to come late, and when parents complained they would shoo us away, telling us: 'It's not our duty to teach.'¹¹⁷

Individual parents in Dharmaur, who found it difficult to work with teachers to address the deficiencies at the primary school, turned to the women's association for help. After discussing the matter collectively, the group decided to advance a complaint about the school teachers to the local administration. Many were surprised to find officers at the district ready and willing to listen to their situation, and after witnessing one of the teachers get transferred from the school for dereliction of duty, they gained faith in the system. Expectations regarding the benefits of collective action around primary education increased. As the head of the women's association retold their experience,

Initially, we were hesitant to work with school teachers, but the positive response from the administration helped build our confidence. Now MTA members visit the school regularly and if the teacher comes late, we tell them kindly, "please should start coming on time"! And in that way our relations with teachers have also improved. One teacher even helped to enroll disabled children in our village.¹¹⁸

Local administrative support came in other forms as well. For example, the primary school suffered initially from no electricity and children often had to work in dark classrooms. The lack of electricity connections (and proper ventilation) is a common problem in rural primary schools throughout India, and classes are often held outside in the school verandah or under a tree. Fierce rains during the monsoon season can, however, make it impossible to hold classes outside for several months out of the school year. To address this problem, the women's association in Dharmaur came together, and with help from the school headmaster, petitioned the local education bureaucracy to have a power line installed at the school. When officials came to survey the problem, they learned that the school had been constructed too far downhill to reach the nearest power line, but with the help of village residents, they found a way to connect the building safely. The women's association held a celebration to inaugurate the primary school's first day with electricity, publicizing their own efforts along with the support they received from local officials.

¹¹⁷ Interview with parent of school children and member of the village women's association, Dharmaur, February 17, 2010.

¹¹⁸ Focus Group Discussion with women's association, Dharmaur, February 9, 2010.

Experiencing these positive returns to collective action was encouraging for the women's association and helped them persuade families in Dharmaur to support the primary school further. For example, families started making financial contributions to ensure that the electricity connection continued to work and that routine maintenance on the school building took place. A mother described how the women's group organized the community to make further investments in the local primary school:

It was our mahila mandal [women's association] that got the wiring done for electricity at the school... But the efforts did not end there. One year, they raised funds from within the village to hire an additional teacher at the primary school, collecting more from the better-off families and less from poor families. They even got people together to help build an additional school room with their own labor.¹¹⁹

By organizing funds and labor, the women's association was essentially complementing efforts by the state, and in many ways, helped fill gaps in the state's primary education policy. School teachers in Dharmaur drew inspiration from their efforts:

The women contribute in areas where we get less support [from the state]. Recently, they helped us send children to represent the school at the district volleyball tournament. They also helped purchase sporting equipment for the school and a carom board as well.¹²⁰

Eventually, the women's association gained official recognition as a Mother Teacher Association (MTA). As a formal body, the MTA assumed a greater role at the school and the Department of Elementary Education extended further support to the groups. For instance, the local Block Education Officer organized meetings throughout the year with MTA members. These meetings provided an opportunity for women to learn about various state policies as well as voice their concerns back to the administration.

The MTA in Dharmaur, which for all practical purposes was embedded in the women's association, expanded its efforts into new areas of policy implementation, such as mobilizing parents to attend parent-teacher meetings and contributing vegetables to help make the Midday Meal more enjoyable for the students. As the school headmaster described:

We hold quarterly meetings with the MTA. They focus more on the child and issues with teaching and learning. The VEC, meanwhile, only deals with school building-related expenses. But actually, we find that the MTA oversees that as well, and we receive a lot of help from the women. Whenever we ask, they get families to contribute two rupees each to help out children who can't afford shoes or a thali [steel plate]. The women also keep a check on the midday meal to make sure the food is good quality and hygienic.¹²¹

That the women's association played a greater role in policy implementation than the even the VEC, the nodal agency mandated at the village-level under the policy framework of SSA, may not be

¹¹⁹ Interview with parent, Dharmaur.

¹²⁰ Interview with school teacher, Primary School Dharmaur, February 12, 2010. Carom is a popular India game played on a plywood board and is similar in concept to billiards.

¹²¹ Interview with school headmaster, Primary School Dharmaur, February 10, 2010.

surprising. Unlike the VEC, whose existence was in large part a formality under state policy, the women's association had a history of organizing collectively and became involved at the school out of a collective concern for the children of Dharmaur. Yet the dominant discourse around decentralization, which has come to inform the administrative structure of India's primary education system, fails to recognize the qualitative differences across groups. Informal associations like Dharmaur's women's association may well have fallen through the cracks were it not for the deliberative norms within the Himachali state, which encouraged local officials to encourage their participation and work collectively to address their needs.

3.5.4. Participation under Strain in Kandhar Ghat¹²²

The findings so far have shown that bureaucratic norms in Himachal Pradesh approximate the deliberative model, and through the hypothesized mechanisms of bureaucratic behavior and civic action, lead to the positive implementation outcomes.

The limitations of the deliberative model need to be taken into consideration as well. In this final case study of Kandhar Ghat, I demonstrate the limitations facing the Himachali state with the rise of privatization and changing social attitudes towards the public school system. Notwithstanding the bureaucracy's responsiveness to local needs, it has been unable to keep pace with these changes. The expansion of rural private schooling and dwindling status of the public school system has contributed to social stratification, undermining efforts by the state to sustain local collective action around primary schooling. These findings suggest that the deliberative model in Himachal Pradesh has relied on the underlying fabric of social cohesion, which is now increasingly under strain with economic growth.

Kandhar Ghat (pop. 657) is a relatively large village located in Shimla's Theog Block. It falls within Himachal's "Apple Belt," a region famous for its lush apple orchards. Surplus apple production had over the last decade come to replace subsistence farming as the primary source of livelihood for residents of the region. Some households also produced off season vegetables (cabbage, peas and tomatoes) to diversify their agricultural portfolio. New income growth in Kandhar Ghat could be discerned immediately from the smell of fresh pine, used to construct several brand new, multistory houses throughout the village. And although the steep, downward sloping mud road leading to the village was hardly finished, expensive vehicles had already sprung up next to houses. For a summary of village indicators in Kandhar Ghat, see Table 3.1. in the Chapter Appendix.

In sharp contrast to Dharmaur, the village examined earlier, I selected Kandhar Ghat precisely because it displayed many of the socioeconomic ingredients one would associate with effective governance, particularly in the domain of education. A wealthy, largely upper caste (*Thakur*) community, residents of Kandhar Ghat took pride in their educational achievements. Many were employed by public agencies, as school teachers, policemen and even local administrators. The prevalence of "servicemen" gave the village substantial access to the state. Residents also displayed a capacity for collective action. During the time of fieldwork, a beautiful

¹²² The findings of this case study are based on close to four weeks of fieldwork in Kandhar Ghat, conducted in March-April 2010. I spent most of that time living as a guest with a family in the village.

new temple had been recently re-constructed through their joint efforts. Lower caste residents had also contributed to the temple's construction even though prevailing caste norms forbade their entry inside the building.¹²³ The temple association of Kandhar Ghat had a long history of collective action. A much older structure (a few hundred years old at least) dedicated to *Shambonath*, the village deity, had only recently been discovered by residents.

For the reasons outlined above, Kandhar Ghat would seem a likely setting for my theory to hold. To the extent that deliberative norms *do not* encourage local community participation around primary schooling, we are pressed to reevaluate and further refine the theory. Far from what I had initially expected, there was little evidence for community involvement in the government primary school in Kandhar Ghat. If anything, collective action around primary schooling had waned. Although the school's physical infrastructure was adequate, the classrooms were poorly maintained and few teaching-learning materials were on display. The school building's electrical connection had not been repaired for years and there was no running water for the toilets. Through direct observation, along with interviews of parents and school teachers, I found that teachers were often late or absent and little teaching activity took place at the school.

A survey I conducted of households in Kandhar Ghat revealed that most families were either educating their children in the urban center of Shimla or else sending them to one of two private schools in the nearby town of Deha, approximately 10km outside the village. Out of 57 students enrolled in the government primary school, 35 belonged to Nepali families who were not even residents of India. With high demand for agricultural labor in the Apple Belt, these families engaged in seasonal migration to work in the orchards, and local teachers had enrolled their children to ensure that the primary school would not be targeted for closure by the local administration. The remaining 22 students belonged to Kandhar Ghat, 12 of which belonged to the SC (*Arya*) community, while the remaining 10 came from upper caste (*Thakur*) families.

During another visit to the government primary school, I found most of the teachers sitting together chatting and reading newspapers at the start of the morning session. They showed no sign of alarm or hesitation when I entered their office and spoke candidly regarding the problems in eliciting community participation, as well as their own delinquent behavior. One of the teachers summarized their general perception:

*We try holding monthly meetings but no parents care to show up. The only reason they send their children to this school is because they don't have to pay any fees. The 'cream' goes to private school. The rest who come here have no ability whatsoever.*¹²⁴

The movement away from the government school system was a relatively recent phenomenon. In fact, it was only ten years prior that community members had come together to petition the state to upgrade the primary school to the middle school level (grades 6-8). Yet enrollment in the middle school dwindled quickly. There was some debate among the school teachers as to why parents in Kandhar Ghat had come to prefer private schooling. After listening to the discussion, the middle school headmaster shared his observations:

¹²³ I was granted access to the temple in Kandhar Ghat only after confirming my upper caste status with the village priest (*pandit*).

¹²⁴ Focus Group Discussion with school teachers, Primary School Kandhar Ghat, April 15, 2011.

*Why is enrollment in government schools declining? Why are so few children from the village coming here? Are we not teaching? That must be it! The main issue is that we're not teaching. The child's educational base doesn't get developed and parents are seeing that. As teachers, our political role has become the biggest obstacle. But these things we can't say out in the open. Here you'll find teachers who take one-and-a-half to two months off from work to educate their own children in Shimla. If you ask me, teachers' children should go to the government school. Why do our kids go to private school? It must mean that we have no any faith in ourselves!*¹²⁵

The headmaster's point was reiterated by residents of Kandhar Ghat, who expressed a clear preference for private schooling. Many felt that the task of monitoring the teachers was too time consuming and difficult, so they had come to rely on proxy indicators of quality. Chief among these was the simple observation that no government school teachers in the village were sending their own children to the government primary school.

However, it was not merely the lack of teaching that irked parents. There was also a growing sense that the government primary school was catering more to children belonging to socially disadvantaged groups, to the detriment of children coming from more affluent families:

*No teaching goes on in the government primary school. The only children that go there come from families that don't care about their education. And that keeps other children behind. Vikas' father [a respected community member] was teaching there so I thought it should be good, but then I visited the school and also saw the 'society' where the other children come from. I told my husband about it, that the teachers don't assign homework, and the parents don't care and give less guidance. So we had our children moved to the private school... But really, the private school is also nonsense. All the government officers in our village did their schooling from the government primary school. But when I saw the environment at the school and 'society' of the children studying there, I decided to pull my son out in fourth grade. Since then I have put him in the Saraswati Vidya Mandir [private school].*¹²⁶

To be seen as part of the "good society" (*uch varg*) in Kandhar Ghat had become increasingly costly with the accumulation of wealth, and residents were mindful of the changes that had taken place in their village. A new culture of consumerism and material display had crept into social life. The education of children, once the basis for collective action within Kandhar Ghat had become an arena for social differentiation. Families sought distinction in the competition for social status. According to a resident who had once served as the head of the PTA for the government primary school:

*People just want to show off that 'look I'm spending money on my kids.' If they paid attention to the government school here rather than sending kids to private school it would run much better. But people don't come together for PTA meetings. Everyone is just busy with their own work. If we came together it would help. Take the middle school. We have five teaching posts but only one is filled with a regular teacher. The rest are para-teachers. Nobody came together to discuss getting another regular teacher. Instead of coming together people are running to private school.*¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Focus Group Discussion with school teachers, Primary School Kandhar Ghat, April 15, 2011.

¹²⁶ Interview with parent, Kandhar Ghat, April 8, 2011.

¹²⁷ Interview with former head of primary school PTA, Kandhar Ghat, April 16, 2011.

A desire for status not only drove some families to remove their children from the government primary school but also contributed to the decline of the village women's association. As families began to amass wealth from the apple industry, membership in the women's association dwindled and attempts to revive it saw little success.

Recent efforts by the state to create women's associations in the form of a Self Help Group (SHG) were similarly unsuccessful in Kandhar Ghat. The local Aanganwadi Worker, a health extension worker, who was a resident of the village, experienced great difficulty trying to organize women around early child health and education:

*We used to have an active mahila mandal, but today nobody wants to come together and develop a group. I tried to get women together to create a Self Help Group, but they see no benefit in forming a group. People see it as something for the poor, and the wealthier families do not like the idea of their women leaving the home to sit together with others.*¹²⁸

The decline of the village women's association in Kandhar Ghat reflects the social changes taking place in the high-growth Apple Belt region of Himachal Pradesh. The association had a long history of collective action in the village and even worked to expand adult literacy with local volunteers for the Adult Literacy Mission during the 1990s. In fact, compared to Dharmaur, the literacy program in Kandhar Ghat had even deeper roots within the village community. Kandhar Ghat had many committed social activists, including government school teachers, who eventually took on positions of leadership within the Adult Literacy Mission and became active members of HGVS. However, rapid income growth and the status distinctions that came with it led to the erosion of collective action in the sphere of primary education, notwithstanding attempts by local officials to promote community participation.

The breakdown of social cohesion in Kandhar Ghat highlights the limits of deliberative norms and the conditions under which they do not lead to effective policy implementation in Himachal Pradesh. Given its propensity to encourage local participation, the education bureaucracy in HP had come to rely on the cohesiveness of societal groups and their ability to make collective demands for education.¹²⁹ A number of studies find that village social cohesion and collective identity is strong in the Himalayan region (Berreman 1972; Sax 1991; Drèze 2004). Social cohesion is reflected in multiple, overlapping social relations, including village women's groups, temple associations and collective rituals around village deities.

When social cohesion is durable, even in unlikely settings like Dharmaur, deliberative norms within the bureaucracy can help encourage and sustain local collective action around primary schooling. In the absence of social cohesion, meanwhile, as observed in Kandhar Ghat, public agencies face an uphill battle trying to encourage communities to work collectively towards policy implementation. The deliberative model, which has proven effective for implementing universal of primary education in Himachal Pradesh, must now cope with the strains of societal exit from government schools. Private schooling has helped reinforce status distinctions, further marginalizing those who cannot afford it. As economic growth and privatization continues apace in

¹²⁸ Interview with local Aanganwadi Worker, Kandhar Ghat, April 12, 2011.

¹²⁹ As one senior official within the state has pointed out, in delivering social services like healthcare and primary education, the bureaucracy drew on existing norms of cooperation and interdependence within communities (Sanan 2004).

regions like the Apple Belt of Himachal Pradesh, public agencies may need to identify new strategies for encouraging local collective action around primary education.

3.6. Alternative Explanations Revisited

Before concluding this chapter, it helps to reexamine alternative explanations in light of the findings presented. In this section I consider the possibility of reverse causality, as well as the role of what may appear a particularly vexing alternative explanation, namely, the role of civil society and social capital. Based on the findings presented here, one may have doubts over the direction of causality. Can we be certain that bureaucratic norms have driven the implementation outcomes for primary schooling in Himachal Pradesh, and not the other way around? Might it not be the case that educational gains are what gave rise to deliberative norms within the bureaucracy? And if not reverse causality, there could still be an omitted factor causing both bureaucratic norms and the education outcomes we observe in Himachal Pradesh. Civil society and social capital would seem a plausible candidate, particularly in light of the distinct social fabric and history of collective action in the Himalayan region. In what follows, I take up these two issues in turn.

3.6.1. Reverse Causality

The problem of reverse causality is an empirical one, but there are also good theoretical reasons for supposing that the spread of primary schooling may have helped foster deliberation within the state. Deliberative democratic theorists argue persuasively for the importance of education, particularly civic education at the primary school level, for developing the skills and virtues associated with democratic citizenship (Gutmann 1999; Macedo 2009).¹³⁰ The spread of mass education strengthens the capability of citizens to engage with public officials and participate in public discussion, enhancing the quality of deliberation within the state.

To dismiss the role that education can play in enabling public deliberation would be a mistake. However, the claim that the growth of primary education spawned deliberative norms within the state of Himachal Pradesh is doubtful in light of the *timing* over which educational gains took place. The most significant gains for primary education were registered in the late 1990s. In their discussion of the “schooling revolution” of Himachal Pradesh, Dreze and Sen (2002:177-178) point out that, as late as 1961, rates of literacy in HP were below average for India across every age category, placing it in the same league as India’s BIMARU states. The initial gains in education were registered in the mid-1980s, more than a decade after state formation in 1971. The most rapid progress for outcomes like student attendance was recorded in the 1990s.

Meanwhile, the deliberative processes that I document, such as informal working groups for public agencies to assess needs and plan, were already in place by the early 1980s, well before HP’s most significant educational gains took place. Interviews conducted with state planners, local

¹³⁰ Arguments in favor of civic education are also made by democratic theorists who disagree with the deliberative model of democracy. On the role of civic education in advancing representative democracy, see Galston (1989).

bureaucrats, school teachers and civic actors, revealed the presence of these processes over that earlier time period. Senior bureaucrats who had risen up the ranks during the 1980s recalled their initial experiences within the bureaucracy, and the learning process they had gone through over the years while holding junior positions. These officials had learned how to engage in collective discussion and coordinate efforts over time, particularly by watching the example of senior officials.

By the same token, civic agencies like HGVS, had already been working with the state by the early 1990s. The networks that these agencies relied upon were not comprised of highly educated citizens, but poorly educated women's groups, the majority of whom were functionally illiterate. Furthermore, it is important to stress that implementation in Himachal Pradesh did not just target the more educated segments of society, but was broadly inclusive. Many of the policy innovations documented, such as mobile schools for the Gujjar tribe and home-based schooling for disabled children, targeted communities that were outside the fold of education, and had no formal representation of any kind within the state.

To be sure, early success in delivering education may have fed back to the bureaucracy and helped consolidate the deliberative norms guiding public officials. Experiencing initial success from their efforts may have motivated bureaucrats to continue along the deliberative path. In addition, the targeting disadvantaged groups may have helped strengthen the civic capabilities within society, allowing the state to draw further on civic input. For example, by targeting girls with education policies early on public agencies may have helped develop the women's groups that later became active participants in the implementation process. It is through such iterative feedback loops that norms are theorized to produce durable effects on policy implementation over time (Ostrom 2000). Having made that point, one should also bear in mind that initial success in policy implementation does not by itself necessitate sustained achievement. As we shall see in the following chapter, the neighboring hill state of Uttarakhand had superior initial conditions, and yet the educational advantage it once enjoyed over Himachal Pradesh deteriorated over time.

3.6.2. Civil Society and Social Capital

Rather than bureaucratic norms, might theories of civil society and social capital better account for the implementation outcomes observed in HP? A large body of research associates civic engagement and social capital with positive outcomes for governance, including public goods provision (Narayan and Pritchett 1999; Krishna 2003; Miguel 2004). Similarly, close observers of the educational achievements of Himachal Pradesh have called attention to the distinct social fabric of the hill region (Drèze and Sen 2002; Drèze 2004). Sociological studies conducted at the village-level have found the absence of sharp social disparities across groups and more inclusive gender norms, all of which appear to have allowed for a sense of village collective identity (Parmar 1979; Saraswat and Sikka 1990). The harsh physical environment, moreover, is thought to have necessitated greater economic interdependence between caste groups. In a similar vein, gender norms in the hill region have also been found to be less restrictive than in the plains (Sax 1991). Due to the peculiar conditions of the hill economic, women across caste groups assumed a greater role in local agriculture, which in turn may have enhanced their freedom of movement and authority over household decisions.

The findings of this chapter do not dismiss the role of social norms encouraging cooperation in the hill region. To the contrary, the comparison across the two villages of Dharmaur and Kandhar Ghat suggests that social cohesion within communities is essential for ensuring that schools function well. What the findings do question, however, is the assertion that societal capacity for collective action is the product of some predetermined cultural propensity to cooperate. The example of Kandhar Ghat in fact shows that a history of collective action around primary education can itself dissipate as the nature of civil society undergoes rapid change.

The limits of the civil society and social capital thesis become most apparent, however, when the implementation process in HP is analyzed in a comparative context. Other parts of India's Himalayan region, which exhibit a similar social fabric and history of village collective action have not had the same success as Himachal Pradesh in implementing primary education. The neighboring hill state of Uttarakhand, which we will examine in the next chapter, exhibits very similar caste and gender norms to HP. It shares a similar history of women's collective mobilization and village religious and political institutions. Furthermore, unlike HP, Uttarakhand has a history of social movements and collective resistance, which some have argued can provide a particularly effective form of social capital for achieving social development outcomes in India (Heller 1999). And yet, Uttarakhand has experienced markedly less success in policy implementation.¹³¹ The relatively poor performance of the public school system in that state may have contributed to the much higher prevalence of rural private schools, twice that of HP.

Again, none of this is to discount the importance of village collective action. As we saw in the case study of Kandhar Ghat, even affluent, modernizing villages that lack social cohesion can experience poor policy implementation. The social fabric and history of collective action in the Himalayan region may well have been enabling conditions, helping to facilitate the state's efforts in policy implementation. The mere presence, however, of these supportive social ingredients can explain neither why village collective action in HP was directed at public agencies, nor why it sustained over time. The sequence of mechanisms observed in the village case study of Dharmaur sheds light on how deliberative norms within the state can help "activate" latent forms of social capital (Krishna 2003). Even traditionally marginalized groups, which comprise a substantial portion of HP's population, have experienced the benefit of organizing collectively around primary education, which would be difficult to sustain absent the bureaucratic norms promoting their participation.

3.7. Conclusion

The findings from this chapter demonstrate that bureaucratic norms governing public agencies in Himachal Pradesh help explain the state's exceptional performance in implementing universal primary education. Notwithstanding the same formal incentives, administrative structures and resources facing other states, the education bureaucracy in Himachal Pradesh operates according to a distinct set of norms that closely approximate the deliberative model developed in

¹³¹ As a noted development scholar and member of the PROBE team has pointed out, "The catalytic role of state initiatives helps to understand why some other areas, where gender relations and social conditions have much the same features as in Himachal Pradesh, have failed to experience a similar transformation of schooling patterns" (Drèze 1999:16).

Chapter 1. An array of field-based evidence points to the presence of deliberative norms within the education bureaucracy and their impact over policy implementation. Interviews and participant observation within the state reveal that the bureaucracy has engaged in a participatory planning process, working collectively across the organizational hierarchy, and alongside elected officials and civic agencies, bending official rules to meet varying local needs. These practices have flourished within the system of patronage politics in Himachal Pradesh, and yet contrary to expectations, they have enabled the state to carry out implementation effectively, from school infrastructure development to monitoring and service delivery.

These findings offer new insights on when and how public institutions govern effectively, not only in India but across the developing world. Efforts to improve public services in developing countries have focused largely on the formal design of agencies and institutions, as seen in the waves of decentralized government and administration. As the above case demonstrated, however, formal decentralization in Himachal Pradesh was underwritten by an informal process, a set of underlying norms that shape how public officials understand their work and the duties required of them. Deliberative norms in the education bureaucracy of Himachal Pradesh encouraged collective behaviors across the hierarchy and divisions of the state, as well as between officials and citizens, making agencies responsive to local needs in a way that formal decentralization by itself could not.

These findings also provoke us to think more carefully about the role of civil society in governance. Public officials in Himachal Pradesh fostered participation not only from well-recognized organizations but informal, often marginalized groups, in particular women's associations. These informal groups provide local knowledge to the state and complement state efforts through the collective monitoring of primary schools. Yet their involvement in policy implementation did not occur without support from the state. The practice of collective participation took place over time. It involved a learning process between public agencies and civic organizations, which was sustained by deliberative norms.

Finally, the findings also suggest certain limitations of the deliberative model. In particular, village-level fieldwork identified the importance of social cohesion. To advance universal primary education, public agencies in Himachal Pradesh have come to rely on the participation of local communities, benefitting in many ways from the relatively cohesive character of village society in the Himalayan region. Local communities have responded to the initiative of public agencies with complementary forms of collective action. Yet the state faces new challenges as rapid income growth and privatization in some regions fragment village society and weaken collective ties around primary education. Whether and how public agencies can operate effectively under these conditions are among the critical questions I take up in the following two chapters.

Chapter 3 – Appendix

Figure 3.1 Administrative Map of Himachal Pradesh

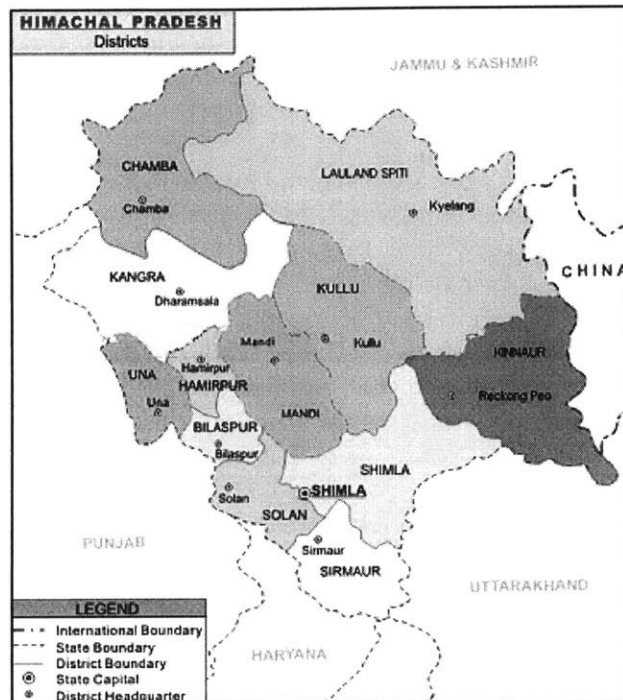
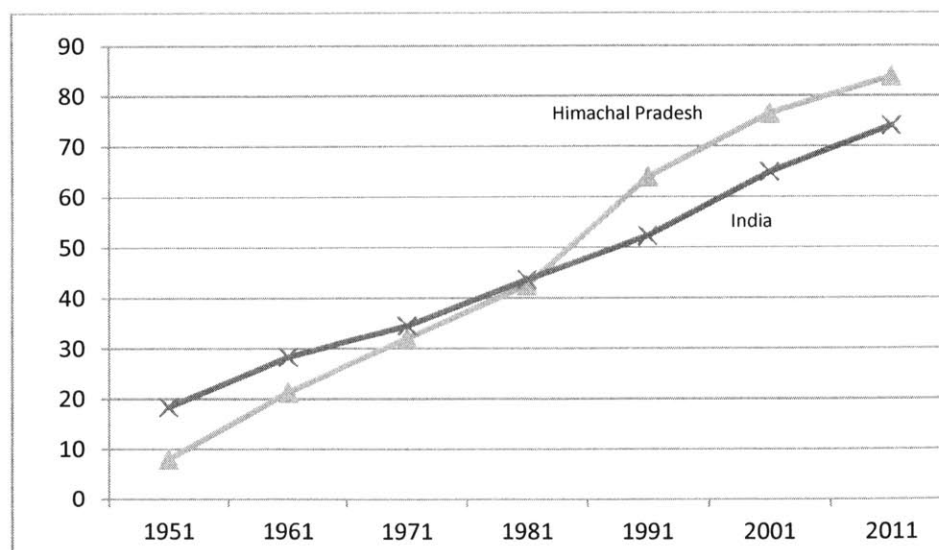


Figure 3.2 Literacy Growth in Himachal Pradesh



Source: Census of India, multiple years.

Table 3.1. Summary of Case Study Villages in District Shimla

Village	Dharmaur	Kandhar Ghat
Administrative Block	Mashobra	Theog
Population	301	657
Caste Composition	30% General (<i>Thakur - Rajput/ Kanait</i>) 70% SC (<i>Arya, Lohar, Mochi</i>)	78% General (<i>Thakur - Rajput</i>) 22% SC (<i>Arya</i>)
Distance to motorable road (km)	2	2.5
House type* (% <i>pucca</i> / semi- <i>pucca</i> / <i>kaccha</i>)	75% pucca 25% semi-pucca	100% pucca
Village economy	Subsistence agriculture	Surplus agriculture (apple orchards, off-season vegetables)
Village Deity (<i>Devta</i>)	✓	✓
Village Temple		✓
Village Women's Group	✓	

*House type describes overall condition of houses in the village and is widely used in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) as an indicator of poverty. 'Pucca' is finished (made from stone or wood), semi-pucca is half-finished, and kaccha is unfinished (made from mud).

Chapter 4. Aspirations Unmet: The Burden of Legalism in Uttarakhand

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter analyzed the exceptional performance of Himachal Pradesh in implementing universal primary education. It connected the state's performance to bureaucratic norms governing public agencies, analyzing the mechanisms through which they implement policies on the ground. Bureaucratic norms in Himachal Pradesh encourage public officials to work collectively to bend rules and policies, and promote civic participation in the implementation process, thereby producing superior outcomes. At the same time, the analysis of Himachal Pradesh raised some lingering questions regarding the role of civil society and social capital. In particular, whether deliberative norms are the causal engine behind implementation, or maybe themselves a consequence of the peculiar culture and social fabric of the Himalayan region, remained an open question.

This chapter examines policy implementation in the neighboring hill state of Uttarakhand, which was carved out of the hill region of Uttar Pradesh in the year 2000 to form a separate state. At the time of India's independence, the hill districts comprising Uttarakhand enjoyed an educational advantage over other parts of India. In terms of basic literacy, Uttarakhand was well ahead of Himachal Pradesh. Having gained autonomy from UP, citizens and public officials held high expectations for their newly established state. As Bhuwan Chandra Khanduri, senior BJP leader and now twice Chief Minister of Uttarakhand remarked at the time, the new state was a culmination of "the long-cherished aspirations of the people of the region."¹³² More than a decade after Uttarakhand's formation, these aspirations remain largely unmet. Today, public agencies in Uttarakhand perform significantly worse on several crucial dimensions of educational service delivery.

The central purpose of this chapter is to analyze the mechanisms behind Uttarakhand's relative underperformance in implementing primary education, particularly in comparison to Himachal Pradesh. Notwithstanding very similar geographic and sociocultural conditions across these two states, bureaucratic norms in Uttarakhand are very different. As the findings will demonstrate, public agencies in Uttarakhand have inherited norms of legalism from their predecessor state of Uttar Pradesh. Public officials in Uttarakhand tend to follow rules, procedures and formal hierarchies strictly and apply policies uniformly across cases. Further, in attempting to protect the state's autonomy from external influence, they marginalize citizens and civic agencies in the implementation process, stifling local collective action around primary schooling. I connect the mechanisms of legalism to poor outcomes for educational service delivery in Uttarakhand.

In analyzing the mechanisms behind implementation in Uttarakhand, this chapter also makes two theoretical contributions. First, it shows that bureaucratic norms can persist over time, even after a state undergoes dramatic changes to its political system. After switching from the highly divisive, multi-party, coalition politics of Uttar Pradesh to the two-party system similar to Himachal Pradesh, legalism persists in Uttarakhand and continues to shape bureaucratic behavior. This finding suggests that bureaucratic norms can exert an independent effect on governance, separate and apart from party politics. Second, the findings shed critical light on debates regarding the

¹³² "With Hopes and Fears," *Frontline*, vol. 17, No. 17, August 19 – September 1, 2000. Access at: <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1717/17170350.htm>.

efficacy of social capital and community participation for local governance. Given its relatively inclusive caste and gender norms, and long history of local collective action and social protest, Uttarakhand is precisely where one would expect theories of civic participation and social capital to obtain. Yet the findings reveal that bureaucratic norms tend to undermine local collective action directed at the state, discouraging citizens and civic agencies from participating in policy implementation. These findings cast doubt on the conventional wisdom regarding civil society's salutary role in governance. Instead, it suggests that the efficacy of civic participation is mediated by bureaucratic norms within the state, particularly when it comes to the delivery of public services for the poor.

The rest of this chapter is organized as follows. Section 4.2 discusses the performance of Uttarakhand within the domain of primary education. Notwithstanding its education head start, and relatively high literacy vis-à-vis the rest of India, Uttarakhand's performance in service delivery is significantly worse than neighboring Himachal Pradesh. After pointing out the limitations of conventional explanations based on economic development and modernization, Section 4.3 presents the conditions lead up to the separation of Uttarakhand from Uttar Pradesh in the year 2000 as well as the political and administrative consequences. I then turn to a preview of the argument in Section 4.4, illustrating the mechanisms through which legalistic norms are hypothesized to produce outcomes for policy implementation.

Sections 4.5 and 4.6 present the main empirical findings. First, I establish the persistence of legalism within the education bureaucracy, from the perspective of actors inside the state as well as citizens and civic agencies outside the state. I then present a series of nested case studies that demonstrate how legalistic norms shape policy implementation across a range of tasks to produce concrete outcomes for policy implementation. Section 4.7 reexamines the findings in light of alternative explanations, showing the limit of civil society and social capital. I conclude the chapter in Section 4.8, summarizing the main findings from the comparative analysis conducted within India's Himalayan region.

4.2. The Educational Scenario in Uttarakhand

Located between Himachal Pradesh and India's border with Nepal and Tibet, Uttarakhand (pop. 10.1 million) was carved out from the hill region of Uttar Pradesh on November 9, 2000 to become the 27th state of India. The state is organized into thirteen administrative districts that fall under two administrative divisions: Garhwal and Kumaon (see Figure 4.1 in the chapter Appendix). These divisions share broadly similar socio-cultural and geographic features, consisting primarily of mountainous terrain with some plains areas in the *terai* region bordering Uttar Pradesh.

Uttarakhand occupies a noteworthy place in India's political and educational development.¹³³ The hill region's political import dates back to colonial rule, when it played a crucial role in the British military and administrative occupation of India. Two highly decorated contingents of the

¹³³ Uttarakhand also carries immense religious significance within India. Known popularly as the "abode of the gods" (*dev bhumi*), Uttarakhand boasts some of India's most ancient and celebrated Hindu temples, pilgrimage sites and festivals. The Ganges and Yamuna, two of India's most significant rivers, originate in the Himalayan glaciers of Uttarakhand, where they are met by a constant flow of tourists and religious pilgrims.

Indian army, the Garhwal Rifles and Kumaon Regiment, were named after the two main regions of the state, bestowing a lasting legacy for Uttarakhand within the armed forces.¹³⁴ Furthermore, some of India's foremost political leaders hailed from the state. These include the likes of Govind Ballabh Pant, a national freedom fighter and statesman renowned for his activist role in the independence movement. Pant later went on to become the first Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, and later joined the central government as a cabinet member under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Several subsequent politicians came from the hill region, including the veteran Congress Party leader Narayan Datt Tiwari, who served as chief minister of both UP and Uttarakhand, and was later appointed governor of Andhra Pradesh.

Uttarakhand's political and administrative significance may have also contributed to the growth of education across the state. It houses the foremost centers for training India's top military and administrative brass. Prior to independence, nationalist leaders sought to create a military institution for developing local armed forces in Uttarakhand. The Indian Military Academy, the principal training institute for officers in the Indian army was established in 1932 in Dehradun, the state's present capital city. In addition, the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), the elite civil service of the Indian state, had its center for professional training based in Uttarakhand. The Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, the premier institution for training and research on public administration in India was founded in 1959 in Mussoorie, a hill station located to the north of the state capital Dehradun. Finally, the famous Doon School, a private boarding school akin to the Eton and Harrow in the UK, was also established by Indian nationalists in Dehradun in 1935. Its alumni include some of India's most influential politicians, bureaucrats and business leaders, including former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

The educational development in Uttarakhand was not limited to a small circle of political elites. Owing perhaps to the region's strong Brahmanical traditions and high concentration of upper caste groups, who attached significant value to learning, Uttarakhand also displayed a strong demand for mass education. While literacy in India's Hindi belt is below the national average, Uttarakhand has outperformed most other states (see Figure 4.2 in the chapter Appendix). Around the time of independence, the erstwhile hill region of Uttar Pradesh was ahead of the plains and even neighboring Himachal Pradesh, in terms of literacy.¹³⁵

To be sure, literacy was extremely low back then. Comparatively speaking, however, some parts of the hill region such as District Almora were far ahead. The significance attached to education was further reflected by the growth of high quality academic institutions. The city of Roorkee in Haridwar District, home to several universities and research institutes, attracted students from across India. The state's leading university, the University of Roorkee, was established in 1847. Later it was upgraded into the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Roorkee in 2001, joining India's most prestigious network of academic institutions.

With its rich educational heritage and decade of autonomous statehood, Uttarakhand's recent performance in primary education has been mixed, if not disappointing. On the one hand,

¹³⁴ The British colonial government declared the hill people of Uttarakhand a "martial race" in recognition of their valor in warding off the Mughals and other invaders, and recruited them heavily to join the Indian army.

¹³⁵ According to the first Census of India (1951), Uttarakhand had a literacy rate of 19 percent, slightly above the national average of 18 percent. At that time, the UP plains had a literacy rate of 12 percent, while Himachal Pradesh was at 7 percent.

the pace of school infrastructure development and gains in access to schooling has been impressive. Yet the quality of education remains very poor, and appears to be declining. Compared to neighboring Himachal Pradesh, educational service delivery in Uttarakhand is significantly worse. And while the two hill states tend to outperform the rest of India in primary education, on some crucial indicators for service delivery, Uttarakhand's performance is below average for India as well.

4.2.1. School Access and Infrastructure

Data from a number of different sources indicate that Uttarakhand has achieved near universal access to schooling. The official data show that 1,659 new government primary schools and 1,385 new middle schools were opened across the state between the years 2002-2011, an expansion of more than 24 percent within a decade (NUEPA 2012). That is no small achievement in a region where infrastructure projects face significant delays due to unfavorable geography and climate. The investments in infrastructure have helped increase school enrollments across the state. According to data from the ASER survey, only one percent of children in the age group 6-14 were not enrolled in school during the 2011 academic year (ASER 2012). Gains in access to schooling have also helped close the gender gap in Uttarakhand and improve the enrollment of rural girls, a vulnerable group that faces significant socioeconomic and cultural barriers to education.¹³⁶

Along with enrollment, student attendance rates are also comparatively high in Uttarakhand. The latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS), one of India's most comprehensive and reliable household surveys, shows that 90.4 percent of rural children ages 6-14 were attending school during the 2005-06 school year, against a national rural average of 68.8 percent (NFHS-3 2007). Uttarakhand is among a small handful of states that have crossed the 90 percent line. Others include neighboring Himachal Pradesh and the educationally advanced southern states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Uttarakhand tends to outperform the majority of Indian states in the provision of physical infrastructure and facilities. Table 4.1 summarizes the 2010 ASER Report data on school facilities and physical inputs in government primary schools in Uttarakhand. Data for the other two states included in this study are given for comparison. As mentioned earlier, these data are drawn from a random sample of approximately 30 primary schools per administrative district within each state. Many of the facilities listed in Table 2, including classrooms and school boundary walls, are provided by SSA, India's flagship education program. The provision of these facilities has been deemed mandatory by the central government under India's Right to Education Act, which carries an implementation deadline of March 2013.

¹³⁶ According to the ASER data, the proportion of rural girls of age 11-14 years who were out of school in Uttarakhand declined from 3.4 percent in 2006 to 1.2 percent in 2011.

Table 4.1 School Facilities and Physical Inputs
(% of schools that have the following)

State	At least one classroom per teacher	Office / Storage space	Boundary Wall	Drinking water facility	Toilets	Kitchen shed
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	76.7	75.5	37.3	87.5	89.2	82.0
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	81.6	87.9	67.0	77.9	94.2	96.3
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	87.4	88.6	44.4	93.1	93.3	89.3
All India	75.6	74.5	52.2	82.6	89.9	81.3

Source: ASER Report (2011).

As the data from the ASER Report show, a greater proportion of primary schools in Uttarakhand possess the mandatory facilities in comparison to other Indian states, with the exception of drinking water facilities. Interestingly, Uttarakhand even outperforms neighboring Himachal Pradesh in the provision of these facilities. While the latter state has received much due praise for its achievements in primary education, less attention has been given to the fact that Uttarakhand has caught up in terms of school infrastructure development over the last decade.

4.2.2. Service Delivery

In contrast to school infrastructure and access, the indicators for service delivery in Uttarakhand paint a dismal picture. Apart from the provision of school lunches under the Indian government's Midday Meal program, the remaining indicators reveal the state's poor performance. According to the ASER Report, the school lunch program was found to be operational in 95 percent of schools during unannounced visits, well above the national average of 81 percent (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Provision of Midday Meal

	Midday Meal Served on day of school visit (%)
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	98.0
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	95.1
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	71.2
All India	83.4

Source: DISE (2012).

First among these is a very high rate of teacher absence. According to the most comprehensive field survey of teacher absence in primary schools across India, Kremer et al (2005) find that approximately one third of school teachers in Uttarakhand are absent on any given day (see Table 4.3). While teacher absence is a nationwide phenomenon in India, the rate of teacher absence in Uttarakhand is fifty percent higher than the neighboring hill state of Himachal Pradesh. Among the 20 states covered under the Kremer et al study, Uttarakhand factors among the bottom five states while Himachal Pradesh falls in the top five. The variation between the two is striking for a region facing comparatively high literacy. Uttarakhand performs worse than even some poorer, BIMARU states like Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, which are considered among India's most educationally backwards states.

Needless to say, little learning can go on in a school system in which teachers routinely fail to show up to school. Yet conditions in Uttarakhand are even grimmer due to the uneven distribution of school teachers across the hill region. According to official reports, close to 20 percent of primary schools in Uttarakhand are manned by just a single teacher. That is almost twice the national average and many times higher than its parent state of Uttar Pradesh (see Table 4.4). The situation is mitigated somewhat considering that the proportion of students enrolled in single-teacher schools is much lower. Most of Uttarakhand's single-teacher schools are located in the interior hills, which are sparsely populated and difficult to reach. While it is true that hill states face a certain disadvantages for policy implementation, in part because they must cater to so many small and dispersed habitations, geographic conditions alone cannot account for the failure to allocate school teachers more evenly across the state. Neighboring Himachal Pradesh, which has even lower population density and equally scattered habitations, has gone much further to reduce regional imbalances in the placement of school teachers.

Table 4.3 Teacher Absence Rate

State	Teacher Absence (%)
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	21.2
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	32.8
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	26.3
Weighted Average	24.8

Source: Kremer et al. (2005)

Table 4.4 Single-Teacher Primary Schools

	% Primary schools	% Students enrolled
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	7.9	4.6
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	19.5	10.6
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	3.0	2.3
<i>All India</i>	11.8	6.1

Source: ASER Report (2011).

The poor quality of education in Uttarakhand's primary school system is reflected further in the lack of adequate teaching and learning materials within schools. According to the ASER Report, less than half of primary schools surveyed had library facilities for students, significantly worse than Himachal Pradesh and even well below the national average (see Table 5.5). While school libraries are not mandatory according to India's primary education policy, many states have made provisions for them anyhow. In practical terms, a school library facility is a collection of books made available for students to read in school or borrow and take home. For a high literacy region that attaches much cultural importance to learning, the lack of library books in primary schools further reflects the state's inability to provide a modicum of quality education. The ASER Report also finds that close to one fifth of primary schools surveyed in Uttarakhand do not have the teaching-learning materials that are provided under India's universal primary education policy. On that measure of implementation, Uttarakhand's performance is slightly above average for India, though again worse than Himachal Pradesh.

Table 4.5 Library and Teaching-Learning Materials
(% of schools that have these available)

	Library Books	Teaching-Learning Materials
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	80.3	91.5
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	48.6	82.4
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	47.7	73.5
<i>All India</i>	63.1	80.4

Source: ASER Report (2011).

Taken together, these quality indicators reflect systematic gaps in service delivery for primary education. Notwithstanding gains in infrastructure provision and improved access to schooling, the state has been unable to ensure that students attending primary schools receive a quality education. Poor education quality may also have contributed to poor retention of students, particularly those coming from underprivileged backgrounds. Table 5.6 shows official dropout rates for boys and girls at the primary school level.¹³⁷ With an official student dropout rate of seven percent, Uttarakhand performs better than average, though still significantly worse than Himachal Pradesh. Dropout rates offer a further window into education quality as they partly reflect the experience students have after attending school. As a number of studies show, students are more likely to dropout when they are not learning, become discouraged and no longer find their time at school worthwhile.

Table 4.6 Student Dropout Rate
(% students in grades 1-5)

¹³⁷ Given pressures to inflate official statistics, actual dropout rates are likely to be higher.

	Boys	Girls	All
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	2.6	2.7	2.6
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	7.4	6.3	6.9
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	17.4	15.0	16.2
<i>All India</i>	10.15	9.75	9.95

Source: Mehta (2011)

The lack of teaching activity within in government primary schools is evidenced further by data on learning levels. The latest ASER Report reveals a bleak picture for Uttarakhand: 42 percent of fifth graders surveyed cannot read from a second grade textbook, while 31 percent of them cannot do basic arithmetic involving two-digit subtraction (ASER 2012). To be sure, poor learning levels are symptomatic of a more general crisis in India's government school system, as discussed earlier in Chapter 2. Even in Himachal Pradesh, which possesses significantly better learning outcomes than Uttarakhand, performance is extremely poor by international standards. Nevertheless, Himachal Pradesh has made slow but steady gains in student learning. Uttarakhand, meanwhile, appears to be following the alarming trend in the plains region of north India, namely, the steady *decline* of student learning levels.¹³⁸ The quality of educational service delivery seems to be going down in Uttarakhand, even while the state continues to expand school access, and provide new infrastructure and facilities. The dismal quality of educational services is puzzling given the educational legacy and value parents attach to education. While it continues to perform better than UP and other states in the plains region, the educational aspirations of citizens in Uttarakhand remain largely unmet.

4.2.3. *The Limits of Conventional Explanations*

Before moving ahead, it helps to point out that the underperformance of public agencies in Uttarakhand is not well-explained by conventional variables. The comparison with Himachal Pradesh brings out the limitations of factors such as geography, economic development and social structure. Conventional wisdom suggests that the performance of public agencies improves with economic development and modernization. As incomes rise, both the aspirations of citizens and their ability to make demands on the state are thought to increase concomitantly (Lipset 1959; Przeworski and Limongi 1997). Processes of modernization, which include urban growth and industrialization, also help fuel demands for social mobility and public services like education (Smelser and Lipset 1966). Within the Indian context, structural features of society are also thought to shape public service delivery, perhaps even more so for a public good like education, caste composition is perhaps the most frequently cited explanation in India.

The comparison suggests that economic development and social structure cannot fully account for poor service delivery in Uttarakhand (see Table 4.7 in the chapter Appendix). If anything, these conventional variables lean in favor of Uttarakhand. As Table 4.7 indicates, Uttarakhand has a similar population size and composition to Himachal Pradesh. Uttarakhand also

¹³⁸ Data on learning levels need to be interpreted with some caution due to problems of measurement and comparison across regions and time

has a smaller share of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, groups that traditionally have been marginalized by India's education system (Gupta 1992). The remaining population in both states consists primarily of Brahmins and Rajputs, upper caste groups that historically dominated the education system. To be sure, the peculiar caste composition in these two states may help account for why the Himalayan region overall tends to outperform other parts of India. Yet it is not by any means a sufficient explanation. Uttarakhand also registers a slightly higher per capita income and is considerably more urbanized than Himachal Pradesh, which suggests that levels of economic development and modernization cannot account for the variation across these two hill states.¹³⁹

4.3. The Creation of a New State

The discussion up until now has concentrated on the nature of the empirical puzzle that Uttarakhand represents. Notwithstanding the infrastructure development and improved access to schooling, the state underperforms significantly in the delivery of educational services. These poor implementation outcomes are puzzling given the region's venerable educational legacy, strong societal demand for schooling, and in light of conventional economic and structural factors. Before moving on to the explanation put forward in this chapter, which centers on the role of bureaucratic norms governing public agencies, we must take fuller account of the political context in which public agencies operate.

In this section I discuss the conditions leading up to Uttarakhand's separation from UP, and the political opportunity it presented for improving the quality of governance. With a new state government and public administration, the hill region was liberated from the clutches of political neglect under UP. Dependent no longer on absentee leaders who spent a majority of their time in UP's distant capital city of Lucknow, the hill residents (*paharis*) of Uttarakhand finally had a state whose express political purpose was to work for them. Moreover, Uttarakhand was no longer subject to UP's divisive political system comprised of multiparty coalitions, regional parties and caste politics, which some have associated with weak governance and inferior public goods delivery (Kohli 1987; Keefer and Khemani 2003). Like Himachal Pradesh, the new state enjoyed a two-party system consisting of the Congress Party and the BJP, India's two national parties.

4.3.1. *The Movement for a new State*

The political movement behind a separate state of Uttarakhand grew out *pahari* dissatisfaction with governance under Uttar Pradesh. Yet a sense of regional autonomy had emerged even before India's independence. Owing to its unique culture and economic system, the hill region administered its own set of civil and revenue laws. Furthermore, in contrast to the UP

¹³⁹ Himachal Pradesh has admittedly made greater strides than Uttarakhand in developing its rural economy, particularly in regions like the apple orchard belt. Yet development emerged well after the state began making strides in primary education (Drèze and Sen 2002). High economic growth regions of the state perform no better in primary education than poorer regions. Much the same holds true for Uttarakhand.

plains, where the exploitative *zamindari* system of land ownership prevailed, Uttarakhand enjoyed separate legal and institutional arrangements for governing village land and revenue.

As part of Uttar Pradesh, however, the hill communities were subject to an administrative and political system that did not respond to their needs. According to a leading scholar of region, the alienation of hill residents stemmed from “[t]he callous attitude of Lucknow in imposing every plan formulated without any consideration to the topographical distinctness of the hills” (Kumar 2000: 93-94). Their grievances found an early outlet in the call for statehood by Puran Chand Joshi. A veteran Communist Party of India (CPI) leader from District Almora, P.C. Joshi raised the issue of autonomous statehood for Uttarakhand on multiple occasions with the central government’s State Reorganization Committee during the 1950s.

Popular demands for separation continued to take place sporadically in the decades following independence as *paharis* grew increasingly dissatisfied with governance under UP. Political agitations were led by the Uttarakhand Kranti Dal (UKD), a regional party that formed in 1979. The party was concerned with the weak political representation for the hill population within UP. At the time, Uttarakhand sent only 19 representatives (out of 424) to the UP state legislative assembly. Concerns over political representation were further brought to light by successive UP governments as well. In 1991, the UP legislative assembly passed a resolution for the creation of a hill state of ‘Uttaranchal,’ a popular name given to the hill region by residents in the plains. However, the central government’s First State Reorganization Commission turned down the proposal on the grounds that the state would not be economically viable (Krishna 2002).

The movement for Uttarakhand reached a critical moment in 1994 when the UP government, led by Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, passed a new reservation policy that extended quotas of 27 percent for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in government jobs and educational placements. The caste groups comprising OBCs, who were based predominantly in the plains areas of UP, and made up only 2.5 percent of the hill population (Aggarwal, Agrawal et al. 1995: 7). The policy stoked fears among *paharis* that plains residents would further infiltrate local public agencies and educational institutions, eating into scarce economic opportunities and further marginalizing their access to the state.¹⁴⁰ The UKD led demonstrations against the policy, and while many were brutally suppressed, they helped foster broad-based public support for a separate hill state (Mawdsley 1996).

To be sure, state planners in Lucknow did not fully neglect to appreciate the developmental needs of the hill region. Special planning efforts for Uttarakhand were initiated in 1974 with the establishment of the Uttar Pradesh Hill Development Department. The Department enjoyed its own ministry within the government, along with a separate bureaucracy and its own budget known as the Uttarakhand Sub-Plan, which formed a component of the state’s five-year and annual plans. Compared to the rest of UP, public expenditures in the hill region were in fact much higher on a per

¹⁴⁰ The new reservation policy followed the central government’s ratification of proposals made by the 1989 Mandal Commission for extending quotas for governmental posts and educational placements to OBCs. In a region with a high concentration of upper caste groups—85 percent as compared to 16 percent for the UP plains—and few economic opportunities outside of subsistence agriculture, OBC quotas would have effectively excluded a significant percentage of the hill population from access to education and government posts, two primary mechanisms for upward mobility.

capita basis (approximately three times that of UP as a whole) and increased significantly with each successive plan (Mehta 2000: 83-84).¹⁴¹

The provision of developmental infrastructure within the hill districts was actually quite high by relative standards, not only for mountainous regions within India but even in comparison to the heavily populated plains of Uttar Pradesh. Table 4.8 in the chapter Appendix presents comparative indicators for physical and social infrastructure in 1991-92, around the time when political agitations for a separate state began to peak. As the table illustrates, Uttarakhand benefited from greater public infrastructure development on a per capita basis vis-à-vis the UP plains.

The above data should be interpreted within the context of the hill region, where topography and dispersed settlement patterns make public infrastructure difficult to develop and maintain. Himachal Pradesh, which by the same time had enjoyed its own state government for twenty years along with generous financial assistance from India's central government, enjoyed better physical infrastructure. Nevertheless, along some indicators, such as school infrastructure provision, Uttarakhand fared just as well, if not better. Moreover, public expenditures according to the Seventh Plan (1985-1990) were actually higher on a per capita basis for Uttarakhand (Rs. 2,223) than for Himachal Pradesh (Rs. 2,171), which is somewhat surprising given that the former had weak representation in the UP state assembly (Kumar 2000: 63). As a close observer of development in Uttarakhand noted soon before the state's formation:

The basic problem with development plans for Uttarakhand is not the lack of general awareness of the problem of hill areas, nor the lack of sincerity on the part of the central and state planners, but rather the absence of an integrated and region-specific approach to thinking about, planning for, and implementing these development programs.¹⁴²

In contrast to the argument for creating the state of Himachal Pradesh, which highlighted the hill region's social and economic backwardness vis-à-vis the plains of Punjab, the hill districts of Uttarakhand were already well ahead of the UP plains along many socioeconomic indicators.

Governance under UP failed to meet the needs of hill communities, and developmental progress was believed to have been stifled by administrative indifference and weak political representation within the state. The system of decentralized planning under the UP Hill Development Department failed to address these concerns. Annual plans drafted in Lucknow were applied to Uttarakhand as if it was just an extension of the UP plains. Scant attention was given to the distinct ecology, culture and local institutions. The demand for Uttarakhand therefore rested on the political argument that the hill region required "autonomy to plan for its own development" (Joshi 1995: 46). To work more effectively on behalf of citizens, public institutions had to be more in touch with *pahari* needs and aspirations.

4.3.2. *Political changes*

¹⁴¹ Funding for social services, including education and health facilities, grew significantly over each successive planning period, and by the Ninth Plan period (1997-2002) comprised the highest share (30 percent) of the overall Uttarakhand Sub-Plan budget.

¹⁴² Mehta (2000: 87).

To address the deficiencies of governance under UP, the creation of Uttarakhand brought significant political changes for the state. When it was part of Uttar Pradesh, the hill region had only 19 legislators in the Vidhan Sabha (State Assembly), accounting for less than five percent of the 424 representatives. With the formation of a new state, the political map for Uttarakhand was redrawn into 70 constituencies, each with its own elected MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly). In addition, the two-party political system that characterized the hill region freed the state from UP's highly divisive political system. Politics in UP was characterized by fragmented, multi-party coalitions, and with the growing influence of regional parties that drew support from lower caste groups residing in the plains, *paharis* had become marginalized by the system. Studies associate these features of UP's political system with poor governance outcomes (Kohli 1987).

In contrast to their neighbors in the plains, the hill population identified more strongly with the BJP and Congress, India's two national parties. That fact was born out in the 2002 state election. The Congress Party won 36 of the 70 seats in the Vidhan Sabha, while the BJP took 19. Even the UKD, the regional party that helped spearhead the political movement for statehood, fared rather poorly, winning only 4 seats. Subsequent state and national elections saw even stronger political support in Uttarakhand for the two national parties.¹⁴³ The electorate, moreover, expressed a strong desire for development and had high expectations for its new political leadership.¹⁴⁴ According to exit poll surveys taken for the first state assembly election, more than half (57 percent) of voters in Uttarakhand considered development the primary electoral issue, while another 12 percent gave primary importance to electing a good Chief Minister (Kumar 2002: 82).

As Uttarakhand's political system experienced a major break from the past, the administrative system also underwent some important changes. The original eight districts that comprised the hill region were reconfigured into thirteen administrative districts with new subdivisions. The capital city of Dehradun housed the new offices of the public administration, including the state Secretariat, which consisted of senior bureaucrats charged with managing departments like education, health, public works, and other policy domains. New officers were selected from among the residential population through a merit-based examination system administered by the Uttarakhand Public Service Commission. Importantly, the state no longer had to rely on the service of bureaucrats from the UP plains, who did not identify with the local population and came to view being sent to the hill region as a "punishment posting."¹⁴⁵ Officers from the hill region who had originally been hired by the UP civil service had the option to be transferred to Uttarakhand, placing them closer to home. In the case of the IAS and other senior officers, additional incentives such as opportunities for promotion were given.¹⁴⁶

Even with these changes, however, one should bear in mind that the formal structure of the bureaucracy remained largely unaltered. Like public agencies in other states, Uttarakhand's Department of School Education consists of a Principal Secretary, whose office oversees planning and implementation, an Education Directorate in charge of managing routine operations, and local administrative teams responsible for implementation within each district. In addition, Uttarakhand adopted the standard organizational blueprint for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), India's flagship

¹⁴³ To be sure, caste still played a role in Uttarakhand politics. The BJP drew a majority of the Brahmin vote while Congress saw more support among lower caste voters.

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¹⁴⁵ "IAS officers reluctant to opt for Uttaranchal," *The Hindu*, September 9, 2000, <http://hindu.com/2000/09/09/stories/02090007.htm>

¹⁴⁶ Interviews with multiple IAS Officer, Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

primary education program. Like other Indian states, Uttarakhand created a State Project Office to oversee the implementation of SSA, established similar administrative offices within each district, and hired bureaucrats from within the Education Department to undertake various official roles and functions. Finally, the state adopted systems for monitoring and evaluation identical to those in Himachal Pradesh and UP. Local district and block officials were in charge of conducting school inspections and a school grading system was developed based on similar standards for infrastructure and academic performance.

4.4. Mechanisms Illustrated

The above discussion provides the political context for policy implementation within Uttarakhand. With its newfound political autonomy, and a political party system thought to be more conducive to good governance, Uttarakhand was perhaps set on a similar path to Himachal Pradesh. And yet public agencies in HP have proven to be far more effective primary education policy, notwithstanding very similar geographic, economic and sociocultural conditions. The relatively poor implementation outcomes in Uttarakhand are even more puzzling in light of the region's venerable educational legacy. In this section, I offer a preview of the argument centered on the persistence of bureaucratic norms within the state, which approximate the legalistic model theorized in Chapter 1. To motivate the discussion, I begin with a puzzling vignette taken from a village in District Almora. I then lay out the mechanisms by which legalistic norms are theorized to produce inferior outcomes for policy implementation in Uttarakhand.

4.4.1. *Motivating Vignette: Teacher Absence in Pujari*

The condition of primary schooling in the village of Pujari epitomized in many ways the larger puzzle in Uttarakhand. Pujari was a place one would expect primary education to be well-implemented. The village-level factors shown to influence education outcomes, such as proximity to roads and caste composition, pointed in its favor. Just a short bus ride from the town center of Dwarahat, Pujari was located along a major roadway that cut through the rural hills of Almora. Famous for its ancient Mahadev Temple, the village consisted entirely of a high-ranking Brahmin priest (*pujari*) community. The *Pujaris* held education in high regard. The community took pride in producing many respected school teachers, army officers and other public servants. The village also had a history of collective action around education. As village elders recounted, the community came together to build one of the area's first schools, attached to the hermitage (*ashram*) of the village temple. A full decade prior to India's independence, residents of Pujari came together to demand a government primary school inside their village, which was established in 1938.

Residents owned small, fragmented landholdings that were large enough to maintain a subsistence livelihood around agriculture and animal husbandry. The main local crops consisted of wheat, rice, *madua* (a local buckwheat), and a variety of pulses. A common pattern across District Almora, young men (and increasingly their families) had migrated out of the Pujari. Based on a survey that I conducted covering every household, close to 90 percent of the new generation had moved out of the village. Some relocated to the district center of Almora, many others to the city of Haldwani located in the plains, and still others moved even farther away to New Delhi. In a pattern

common to the hill region, the majority of men lived outside while their wives stayed behind with their parents, performing agricultural work and tending to the household. Most households relied on income from remittances, and a considerable number of them had family members employed in government services, including education, forestry and the military.

Notwithstanding the high demand for education, the conditions of primary schooling in Pujari left much to be desired. Soon after Uttarakhand achieved statehood, the local education bureaucracy upgraded the government primary school to a new building. As I observed during fieldwork, the physical facilities mandated under SSA, from classrooms to a school boundary wall, had been constructed. Brand new bathrooms were recently installed as well, and as the school's head teacher pointed out to me, the local education bureaucracy had asked her to submit photographs documenting their completion. Parents in Pujari were deeply dissatisfied with the quality of education at the school. The head teacher, who lived only a few kilometers away in the town of Dwarahat, was routinely late or absent from the school. When she did come to the school, parents usually found her seated in the office while the children sat alone in the classrooms working on the assignments she had given them that morning.

These results were all the more puzzling given the presence of community groups involved in education. A women's association (*mahila mangal dal*) was established in the village in the early 1990s with the support of a local grassroots NGO. The association organized around a variety of local needs, including early child education, environmental sustainability, alcoholism and other issues. The group helped establish a local preschool, known as a *balwadi*, which not only attracted students but also served as a community center for women and other residents to hold meetings and voice their common needs. The *balwadi* ran for more than ten years before being converted into a *sandya kendra*, an afterschool center that provided local school children with educational support with an emphasis on environmental learning.

The problem of poor quality education came up many times during meetings held by the women's association. A few of them, who were also members of the Village Education Committee (VEC) in the government primary school, tried raising the issue at quarterly school meetings as well. The head teacher complained about the difficulties of having to teach five grades on her own, in addition to all the administrative duties under SSA. She had requested the Department of Education to send an additional teacher to the school, but teacher rationalization policies prohibited the posting of new teachers at roadside schools. Moreover, the primary school had a total enrollment of only 21 students, since the majority of families from Pujari had relocated outside the village. Being a roadside school with relatively few students, the local bureaucracy denied the request for an additional teacher.

The women's group decided to take matters in its own hands. They organized funds from within the community and appointed a local teacher to assist with teaching at the school. While that helped raise the level of teaching activity, parents were still unhappy with the head teachers' repeated absence and community-school relations deteriorated even further. Concerned mothers from the women's group came together to lodge a formal complaint with the local education bureaucracy. Meanwhile, the head teacher, who belonged to a lower caste community, filed her own complaint against the group under the SC Act, a law that protected Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

from atrocities and harassment committed by upper castes.¹⁴⁷ Meanwhile, officials from the local education bureaucracy extended little support to the women's group, stating that the group was not recognized by the state and that members could not set foot on school premises unless they were parents and had been called for an official meeting. With the fear of having to face the legal system, and that too with little bureaucratic support, the women's group decided to withdraw its complaint on the head teacher. Faith in the government school system had reached an all-time low.

The situation in Pujari may sound exceptional, yet similar observations emerged throughout the course of my fieldwork. Parents in villages across Almora expressed an overwhelming desire to educate their children. In many cases, local communities had mobilized collectively and made sacrifices on behalf of their primary school. Local officials, meanwhile, displayed dedication to their work and went to great lengths to open new schools, upgrade infrastructure and conduct routine school inspections. And yet the system fell apart when it came to the delivery of education. Even in villages where teacher-community relations were excellent, parents felt that the primary school system was not working on behalf of their children. To better understand the puzzling implementation outcomes in Pujari, I shift our attention to the bureaucratic norms operating within the state.

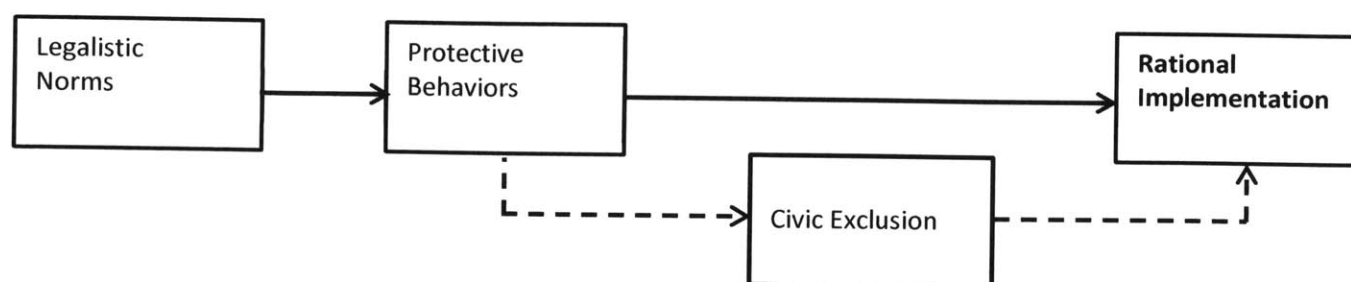
4.4.2. Theoretical Argument in Brief

The condition of primary schooling in Pujari in many ways epitomizes the broader puzzle of policy implementation in Uttarakhand. How do we account for a system that appears to perform quite well in the provision of school infrastructure and yet flounders in the delivery of educational services? This section offers a preview of the argument centered on bureaucratic norms governing public agencies in Uttarakhand. According to the theoretical framework laid out in Chapter 1, bureaucratic norms shape policy implementation through two channels (see Figure 3.1). First, they influence the behavior of public officials in carrying out the administrative tasks underlying universal primary education. Second, bureaucratic norms structure how public agencies relate with civic actors, and thereby influence the nature of civic participation during the implementation process. The combination of bureaucratic behavior within the state and civic action outside of the state produce outcomes for policy implementation.

As I elaborated in Chapter 1, legalism aims to promote rule-following behavior. Bureaucrats subject to legalistic norms adhere to official rules and procedures. They learn to apply policies uniformly without making exceptions for particular cases. Bureaucrats abide by official hierarchies and resist input from outside agencies that may interfere with the state. Legalism aims to prevent interference or capture by societal groups, while ensuring the integrity of the state in carrying out its official mission. Bureaucrats tend to exclude citizens and civic agencies from decision-making. In areas where civic participation is mandated by law, local bureaucrats work through official channels, marginalizing the participation of informal or unrecognized associations.

¹⁴⁷ The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act was enacted in 1989 by India's Central government to prevent atrocities against Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).

Figure 4.3 Theoretical Process



To connect bureaucratic norms to outcomes for policy implementation in Uttarakhand, it helps to break apart the activities involved in delivering universal primary education. Table 3.1 provides a summary of the critical administrative tasks involved in administering India's primary education policies along with a brief description of the associated bureaucratic behaviors prescribed by legalistic norms.¹⁴⁸ These tasks are divided into three broad categories of activities: (1) school planning and provision, (2) delivery of educational services, and (3) system monitoring and feedback. While the first category involves activities related to the quantitative aspects of universal primary education, like the provision of physical infrastructure and school facilities, the latter two sets of activities are more likely to influence the quality of education. System monitoring and feedback in particular influence education quality, since the daily functioning of primary schools is largely out of the hands of state planners as well local bureaucrats stationed in a district office, which can be hours or even days away from villages.

Figure 4.4 Policy Implementation: Tasks and Behaviors

Administrative Tasks	Bureaucratic Behaviors
<i>School planning and provision</i>	
School infrastructure development	-Conduct planning process within dedicated agency and restrict outside input or interference
Regional planning and policy targeting	-Apply policies uniformly across regions and social groups
<i>Educational service delivery</i>	
Teacher posting	-Apply uniform, rational procedure for allocation of teachers across schools
Academic support	-Provide academic resources in uniform, top-down process
Community support	-Work with officially-recognized school agencies within the areas mandated by policy

¹⁴⁸ As discussed in more detail in Chapter 1, the list of critical tasks was compiled after conducting extensive interviews with public officials, nongovernmental agencies, education experts and school teachers across north India.

Monitoring and feedback	
System monitoring	-Follow top-down school inspection model and identify gaps through official surveys
Local feedback	-Incorporate local feedback through official channels

As a preview to the detailed case studies presented in the following section, let us briefly consider a few examples of how legalistic norms shape bureaucratic behavior around these activities. Take first the task of infrastructure planning and development. India's SSA program aims to achieve universal access to primary schooling through the construction of new schools. Public agencies have, in theory, a diversity of methods at their disposal for carrying out that task. They could, for instance, call on elected officials to identify villages in their constituencies that require school buildings, or at an even more local level, encourage gram panchayats (elected village councils) to come forward with proposals for new school within their areas. They could work with community groups to identify buildings that require remodeling and additional facilities like school classrooms and kitchen sheds for cooking the Midday Meal.

Faced with these options, Uttarakhand's education bureaucracy tends to confine the task of infrastructure planning and development within a dedicated sub-division of the education bureaucracy, in this case the Civil Works wing of the SSA State Project Office. In carrying out their responsibilities, bureaucrats follow official mandates for new school construction closely, avoiding local demands and political interference. For instance, when deciding where to construct a school building, they adhere to rules regarding school distance, which requires that villages have access to a primary school within one kilometer of their habitation, whether the local community expresses the need for a school or not. By overriding local demands, bureaucrats attempt to steer clear of local politics and ensure that policies under SSA are administered uniformly across all communities.

Consider further the activities around monitoring and feedback, the mechanisms by which public agencies try to ensure that the education system is functioning well. Bureaucrats have in theory a range of possible methods at their disposal for monitoring the education system. Operating under legalistic norms, officials in Uttarakhand's education bureaucracy tend follow a standard, top-down model of school inspections. The inspection model requires local administration to conduct a set number of school visits per month and run through a checklist of items, particularly for infrastructure and other inputs like the Midday Meal. These monitoring visits are supplemented by official surveys conducted by school teachers to identify out-of-school children and other potential gaps in policy implementation.

Meanwhile, the same norms compel bureaucrats to disregard feedback from outside agencies, such as local NGOs and community groups. Bureaucrats have reason not rely on these informal channels. For one, information produced by agencies outside of the state does not carry official recognition, making it difficult for local bureaucrats to justify using it for planning purposes. Moreover, non-state agencies may possess vested interests in exposing the problems at a particular school or exaggerating a particular set of local conditions, which renders their input illegitimate in the eyes of public officials. By following standard, rational monitoring procedures and limiting the

range of feedback to official information sources, bureaucrats avoid outside interference and ensure the integrity of the public system.

The above examples help illustrate the connection between the bureaucratic behaviors induced by legalistic norms and the implementation outcomes observed in Uttarakhand. In the domain of school planning and provision, cordoning off the project office in charge of school infrastructure planning and development from other agencies, the education bureaucracy has been able to avoid local political interference while expanding access to schooling. By adhering to official rules and procedures for the provision of school facilities, bureaucrats effectively override varying local needs and demands. Yet the same bureaucratic norms that may enable school infrastructure provision are in many ways ill-suited to the more complex tasks associated with delivering educational service delivery.

The standard methods of school inspection and official channels of feedback tend to sideline local knowledge and participation. Alternative sources of feedback, which may include grassroots NGOs as well as informal, community-based organizations, can identify routine problems facing primary schools. Bureaucrats themselves point out during interviews that civic participation is critical to monitor and correct for deficiencies. Yet incorporating community feedback exposes the state's rational administrative processes to local politics. Faced with the tradeoff between community support and the potential for political interference, local bureaucrats in Uttarakhand will tend to marginalize community participation. In so doing, they undermine their own ability to monitor primary schooling and redress critical gaps in implementation. This can lead to outcomes as observed in the case of Pujari, where teacher absence persists even in the face of local collective action directed at the state. As the subsequent case studies will further demonstrate, the tendency to exclude non-state actors in the policy implementation process tends to undermine collective action around primary schooling, leading to further deterioration in the quality of educational services.

4.5. The Persistence of Legalism

Having now reviewed the mechanisms through which bureaucratic norms are theorized to operate in Uttarakhand, this section presents the main empirical findings of the chapter. It begins by establishing the existence of legalism within the state, drawing on examples taken from different divisions and levels of the education bureaucracy as well as the experiences of civic agencies involved in primary schooling. Contrary to the expectations for this new hill state, legalism norms continue to guide bureaucratic behavior in Uttarakhand, even as state planners attempted to learn from neighboring Himachal Pradesh and adopt a similar approach to policy implementation.

One might have expected Uttarakhand's newfound political autonomy to bring about significant changes in the operation of the bureaucracy. Chief among the arguments for creating the new state was that public institutions would be more responsive to the needs of the hill population. With the groundwork for better governance in place, public agencies in Uttarakhand could focus attention and resources on fulfilling their *raison d'être*, namely, the social and economic development of the hill state. As discussed earlier, the problem of governance was not simply a dearth of policies and public investment, but a governance process that failed to account for the region's geographic and cultural complexities. Political autonomy was meant to bring about a change in how that process took place.

Yet the new state was not a *tabula rasa*. Having spent the first fifty years of post-independent history as part of UP, public agencies in Uttarakhand inherited a bureaucratic legacy. Fieldwork conducted in Uttarakhand provides strong evidence for the persistence of legalism within the state. This section is divided into two parts. The first part presents a perspective from inside the state. It draws on in-depth interviews of bureaucrats who spent much of their careers in UP, offering unique insight on how administrative systems operate within each state. In addition, it draws on participant observation conducted within public agencies in charge of primary education. The second part presents a set of perspectives from outside the state, based on interviews and participant observation with non-state actors, including civic agencies, citizens and social activists.

4.5.1. Inside the State

The first stream of evidence for the persistence of legalism within the state comes from the experience of state planners and other senior public officials. Soon after Uttarakhand's formation, these officials were searching for new ideas and strategies to develop the hill region. With strong political will and commitment within the bureaucracy, they believed the opportunity was ripe to consider novel approaches to governance. Many saw Himachal Pradesh as a model of hill region development and looked to the bureaucratic leadership there for new ideas. As a senior official from the Department of Health recalled:

*There was a feeling among the leadership that we wanted to implement policies in a new way. Though initially we followed the same structure as in UP, the discussion came up that we should do things differently. Teams were put together to visit other hill states like Himachal Pradesh and Jammu-Kashmir, and they came back with some new ideas.*¹⁴⁹

Bureaucrats working in the Education Department were especially keen to learn how education policies could be adapted to better serve the hill region. Among the lessons they took away from Himachal Pradesh was the importance of having an “*integrated approach*” to bureaucratic governance, one that involved greater coordination between organizational levels and across different departments within the state. Within the domain education, an integrated approach meant lifting the traditional barriers between public agencies in charge of different aspects of education policy, as well as improving coordination across departments like education and health.

With these ideas in mind, state planners in Uttarakhand tried to change how public agencies operate by altering their formal design. They gave the Department of School Education a unified mandate to cover both primary and secondary schooling. At the local level, each district was assigned an official known as the District Education Officer (DEO) who would oversee the administrative teams in charge of primary and secondary schooling. The reasoning behind the change was to encourage greater coordination across subdivisions of the state, which would remove inefficiencies and streamline the process of service delivery.

By lifting the formal barriers to coordination, state planners believed the bureaucracy could more effectively tackle problems that cut across departments, such as students dropping out after

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Senior Official, Department of Health, Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

completion of primary school. A similar change involved the integration of primary and pre-primary education, the of latter which had previous been under the Department of Health. The new administrative mandate required that centers for delivering early child health policies, known as Aanganwadi Centers, within or very close to primary schools and utilizing them for the delivery of preschool education. The idea behind the integration was to improve the readiness of young children to participate in formal schooling, provide a base level of learning among entering students, and to streamline enrollment into the primary school system. As one officer remarked, these changes were an attempt to work beyond standard organizational divisions:

Since our UP days, there was no integration across departments, so everyone would work in isolation. What we saw in Himachal Pradesh was that different offices worked closely together...A new organizational structure was established [in Uttarakhand] to coordinate between child health and education. Instead of breaking them apart like before, we adopted a structure that tied the different functions together.¹⁵⁰

While the integration of child health and education through preschool centers had taken place many years prior in Himachal Pradesh, for Uttarakhand the new system called for some changes to the routine of school teachers and health workers. Primary school teachers were now asked to coordinate with Aanganwadi workers, the frontline staff in charge of early child health services, to implement the new preschool centers. Aanganwadi workers, meanwhile, were asked to work with local communities to enroll young children in the preschool centers. To carry out their new roles and responsibilities, the Aanganwadi workers would receive special training from the Department of Education.

The attempt to reorganize the delivery of education made sense to state planners in theory, yet proved difficult to institute in practice. As several officials pointed out to me during interviews, the concept of “convergence” across functions had become the rallying call within the state to lower organizational barriers and improve the efficiency in public services. For these senior bureaucrats, the idea of convergence made perfect sense. As officers in the IAS, they spent most of their careers rotating across departments. That experience gave them with a bird’s eye view of the state, the overlap across functions, and potential gains of coordination. Yet there were doubters even among the IAS ranks in Uttarakhand. Some believed that convergence was not only practically difficult, but potentially dangerous for the orderly operation of the state. As part of the UP administration, the different departments of Uttarakhand’s bureaucracy had grown accustomed to operating in organizations silos and would fight vigorously to retain their autonomy.

The worries expressed by these officials were borne out as the education and health bureaucracies attempted to coordinate efforts for the new preschool centers. As senior officials explained, the preschool centers were not functioning well due to the lack of coordination between local health and education officials, and poor cooperation between frontline employees, the primary school teachers and Aanganwadi workers. During focus group discussions with Aanganwadi Workers in District Almora, many expressed the belief that managing preschool centers was a diversion from their official mandate, which was to provide child health services. As one worker summarized it, “*Teaching the preschool children is the duty of the Education Department, not ours.*”¹⁵¹ That frontline workers should resist unwanted changes to their routines may come as little surprise to

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Education Official, SSA, Dehradun.

¹⁵¹ Focus Group Discussion with Aanganwadi Workers, District Almora, Uttarakhand.

those who have studied organizations. Yet the reason behind the resistance was not obvious. At first glance, one might presume that the problem was one of incentives. Had state planners provided the appropriate mix of economic rewards and sanctions to these frontline workers, they would have been more likely to adopt their new roles and responsibilities.

While can hardly deny that incentive problems exist across public agencies in India, incentives alone cannot account for the behavior of frontline workers. In practice, Aanganwadi workers were evaluated based on meeting certain performance targets. The targets relate to the delivery of child health services, including immunization, the provision of nutrition programs, assisting with births, measuring infant birth weights, and so on. The incentive-based view may treat the preschool program as a case of failure by design. Aanganwadi workers were not evaluated on the attendance or learning levels of preschool students. However, the pressure to achieve child health targets, and thereby obtain positive performance reviews, could not by itself dictate *how* one ought to go about meeting those targets. Some health workers actually preferred running the preschool centers. For one, having centers that operated at a fixed day and time each week gave them the chance to plan their village visits ahead of time. Moreover, the preschool center provided them access to children without having to hike through an entire habitation and visit families door-to-door.¹⁵²

These findings are not meant to suggest that the design of incentives does not matter. The point, rather, is that public employees look to more than just incentives in determining how to carry out their duties. The discontent expressed by the Aanganwadi Workers in Uttarakhand regarding the preschool program reflected a deeper concern over preserving the organizational rules and boundaries. Many expressed concern that the preschool policy would create a slippery slope, encouraging the government to continue redefining their official responsibilities, to the point where, as one Aanganwadi worker put it, “*Our basic duty is no longer recognizable to us.*”¹⁵³ A similar view was maintained by senior officials in the Department of Health. According to a bureaucrat in charge of overseeing the preschool centers, the new system had the potential to undermine the health bureaucracy’s primary mandate:

*The [preschool] centers are fine in theory, but our mission here is not to teach the children. I would not expect the Aanganwadi Worker to interrupt a school teacher who is running a class to ask for help with the preschool...In the same way, I would not expect my fellow colleague in the Education Department to interfere in our work.*¹⁵⁴

The official quoted above did not fail to appreciate the linkages between early child health and education. He cited with approval, for instance, the success of India’s Pulse Polio campaign, which calls for primary school teachers to help organize monthly child immunization drives on school premises. Yet even that effort, he believed, could lead to confusion between the two departments. Similarly, his counterparts in the Department of Education felt that school teachers already had too many responsibilities and should not be engaged in public health work, as it may detract from their

¹⁵² As I discussed in the previous chapter, Aanganwadi Workers based in District Shimla of neighboring Himachal Pradesh found it advantageous to run the village preschool centers. Faced with the same formal incentives as their colleagues in Uttarakhand, they viewed the state’s preschool program as an opportunity to establish community ties and thereby achieve their monthly child health targets.

¹⁵³ Focus Group Discussion with Aanganwadi Workers, District Almora, Uttarakhand.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with senior official, Department of Health, Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

teaching duties. These officials expressed a larger concern shared by their colleagues and junior staff, namely, that the attempt to merge duties across departments violated the norm to maintain official boundaries between divisions of the state.

Further evidence for the persistence of legalistic norms in the Uttarakhand bureaucracy comes from fieldwork conducted inside the Department of Education. Recall that India's central government rolled out SSA, the country's flagship policy for universal primary education in 2001, around the same time that Uttarakhand achieved statehood. These two concurrent events brought a set of common changes to the education bureaucracy, namely, the decentralization of the political system and administrative structure for primary schooling. These conditions offer a test for whether bureaucratic norms persist in a bureaucracy subject to new formal institutions. The SSA program in Uttarakhand was comprised of officials promoted from within the Education Department, many of whom had experience working in both the hill region as well as the plains of Uttar Pradesh. That experience placed them in a unique position to reflect over whether and how institutional changes affected the bureaucracy and their day-to-day work.

According to interviews conducted with officials from SSA and the Education Department, the most palpable change experienced was decentralization, or as some put it, the "*closing of distance*" within the state. How they came to understand and respond to decentralization offers insight on the norms governing the education bureaucracy. On the one hand, many saw tangible benefits to having a smaller, more decentralized system of government. Public officials at various levels of the state were more accessible, making it easier to communicate with each other and carry out routine work. As an official from the SSA State Project Office noted, the degree of communication had improved across the education bureaucracy:

*Things are different now that we have a small state. Information from here can go straight to the officials at the top. During UP days, nothing ever reached Lucknow or Allahabad. But today, if something is needed, I have direct links to the Directorate. I can even tell you what the district officer in Pithoragarh [District] is doing right now.*¹⁵⁵

Decentralization allowed for greater contact between seniors and subordinates, even those based in far-flung districts like Pithoragarh. As a result, administrative procedures like the release of funds to local districts and the dissemination of reports and guidelines, could take place more quickly with fewer bottlenecks. Local bureaucrats, who at one time could not expect to interact with top-ranking officials like the Secretary of Education, felt that organizational barriers had been lowered and a direct link between their offices and the senior administrators in Dehradun had been established.

Yet decentralized system exposed an underlying tension between the "*closing of distance*" and bureaucratic norms that compelled officials to uphold official procedures and hierarchies. Lower-level bureaucrats, who in the past had little access to upper echelons of the Education Department, found themselves in greater contact with senior officials. Senior officials, meanwhile, who had been steeped in the hierarchical system of the UP state, increasingly had to address the needs of subordinates. While officials acknowledged certain benefits such as improved information flow within the bureaucracy, many felt that procedures and hierarchies were under threat and had to be preserved. As a senior official from the education bureaucracy explained:

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Education Official, State Project Office, SSA

*We separated from UP, why? Because we were geographically different, and we were kind of tail-enders, far away from Lucknow... And a small state means what? It should mean better administration. Now there is greater access to officials like the Director and Secretary. That is helpful up to a limit. Having more access is not positive when procedures and chain of command get broken. And in that way, I feel we were much better off as part of UP.*¹⁵⁶

Other officials expressed a similar worry that access to the state could be misused. Rules and procedures had to be tightened or else the bureaucracy would fall prey to political interference, or worse even, capture by elites. The new political system—the new Vidhan Sabha was comprised of 70 MLAs as opposed to 19 under UP—gave people “too much access” to the state, creating the potential for corruption. According to another official working in the education bureaucracy:

*Before when we had our Education Directorate in UP, no teacher would think to approach us. All their concerns would flow through official channels. But with greater access to the state, things can happen backhandedly.*¹⁵⁷

Knowingly or not, these bureaucrats had articulated prime arguments for legalism. In contrast to their colleagues in Himachal Pradesh, who came to understand the (albeit problematic) participation of local communities and their elected officials as critical to good governance, bureaucrats in Uttarakhand treated the participation of non-state actors with suspicion. A retired IAS officer residing in Dehradun who had held several senior positions in the UP state put it to me starkly. Unless the Uttarakhand bureaucracy upheld measures to protect itself from outside interference, a “breakdown of order” within the state was inevitable.

To include non-state actors in the policy implementation process was seen as a violation of legalism, and local officials that attempted to work outside these norms faced sanction. As the nested case studies will show in greater detail, it was not for a lack of motivation or ideas that local officials in Uttarakhand failed to adapt policies in creative ways like their colleagues in Himachal Pradesh. Rather, it was the overriding pressure within the state to follow procedures tightly. In the words of a local bureaucrat who tried bending the rules regarding the geographic placement of school teachers to better suit what he thought were the needs facing primary schools in his local administrative block:

*Now if I try to press the matter [of teacher placement], district officials will question me. Why aren't you following the rules? And if we share some ideas, they respond by throwing more paperwork [kagazi kaam] at us.*¹⁵⁸

In their attempts to bend rules, local bureaucrats like the one quoted here faced sanctions. Questioning by senior colleagues within one's district was an indication of having upset officials further up the hierarchy. And the assignment of additional paperwork, something that local officials often demanded from school teachers, was also taken as a sign of one's lower status within the bureaucracy. Through these subtle mechanisms, local officials in Uttarakhand learned to carry out the demands of legalism.

¹⁵⁶ Senior Official, Department of Education, Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

¹⁵⁷ Senior Official, Department of Education, Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

¹⁵⁸ Interview, Block Resource Coordinator, District Almora.

4.5.2. Outside the State

The second stream of evidence for the prevalence of legalism within the state comes from the experiences of individuals and groups outside the state. The perspective of non-state actors is particularly important policy areas like primary education, which rely on civic input and community oversight. Participant observation and in-depth interviews conducted with citizens, social activists and civic agencies working in early child education and related policy domains shed further light on how non-state actors understand the internal workings of the state. Their high hopes for change notwithstanding, these stakeholders found the new administrative system a continuation of the “UP style” of governance, one that gave full authority to senior bureaucrats while marginalizing local communities and civic agencies in the policy implementation process.

Consider first the experiences of Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi (USN), a well-regarded NGO that has worked for more than 25 years in the areas of early child education, community empowerment and environmental sustainability.¹⁵⁹ Based in the hill district of Almora, the organization was founded by Dr. Lalit Pande¹⁶⁰, a mechanical engineer hailing from a Kumaoni family belonging to the upper echelons of Uttarakhand’s intellectual class. The son of a highly decorated civil servant in the IAS, Dr. Pande completed his education at the Doon School, IIT-Delhi and MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Dr. Pande and his organization were well-versed in the vernacular of public agencies and officialdom. Under India’s New Education Policy of 1986, the Department of Education appointed USN a nodal agency for advancing environmental education in the hill region of erstwhile Uttar Pradesh. The organization worked with the Department of Education to create textbooks, teaching manuals and activities around environmental education in government schools.

Along with its activities in the formal education system, USN had also engaged in less formal, community-based activities around education, community empowerment and environmental sustainability. These activities were conducted primarily through a voluntary network of women’s groups (*mahila mangal dal*) operating in more than 1,000 villages in Uttarakhand. Working through local NGO partners across the state, USN provided the *mahila mangal dals* with support and guidance to organize collectively around a multitude of issues affecting their communities.

Back in the early 1990s, women’s groups began to express an interest in early child education. USN responded by helping to establish informal, locally-managed preschool centers (*balwadis*) across the state. Communities took charge of the centers on their own, providing land, labor and other forms of voluntary assistance. Meanwhile, USN provided technical inputs, including training to local instructors, routine monitoring of the centers and local capacity-building for the women’s groups. Although the state had not granted the *balwadi* centers any formal recognition, they often served as the primary educational institutions within the villages, as universal education policies like SSA had not yet been implemented. Importantly, they also served as community centers, a public space for women and other community members to come together and discuss their collective needs.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ More information on Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi is available at: <http://www.ueec.org.in>.

¹⁶⁰ Dr. Lalit Pande agreed to have his identity disclosed for the purposes of this study.

¹⁶¹ To learn more about the *balwadi* program and its role in helping to forge communities, see Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi (2001).

Like many other civil society groups, USN had high aspirations when Uttarakhand was established in 2001. Yet they found the bureaucracy even more stifling than under Uttar Pradesh. Because the *balwadi* program was supported directly by the central government's Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), the education bureaucracy of UP was in some ways sidelined from process. Dr. Pande and his colleagues at USN found that to be a blessing, as they did not have to face the routine scrutiny of local officials, which could have been debilitating for their work. The UP administration was, in their words, "*neither a support to us nor a hindrance.*" Officials from Lucknow would visit every now and again, but did not pay much attention to the organization's work.

With the creation of Uttarakhand, the education bureaucracy took a renewed interest in local civic agencies and began scrutinizing organizations whose work did not conform to official rules and procedures. One of the challenges facing the *balwadi* program was that it did not meet the rules regarding the timing and location of preschool centers. As I mentioned earlier, the Aanganwadi Center program instituted by the state required preschools to be located within or beside the government primary school. By contrast, the placement and timings of the *balwadi* centers were decided by way of deliberation by local communities. With the strict enforcement of rules by the state, the *balwadi* centers could not continue operating under the state's new preschool program. As Dr. Pande explained, USN faced questions regarding its *balwadi* program:

*The balwadis went on for 20 years. Though we experienced some hiccups along the way, the program worked. When Uttarakhand broke off from UP we were very positive. We wanted to work more closely with the state and tried being more proactive. But instead of supporting our work, we found the bureaucracy questioning us. They would come up with any number of technicalities about our approach that did not fit with official rules and requirements.*¹⁶²

While the bureaucracy was guided by a concern for official rules, USN operated according to a different set of principles that took local knowledge and community participation as paramount. The *balwadi* program was implemented according to the needs of target communities. When it came to decisions around the timing and location of the *balwadi* centers, women's groups enjoyed the full authority and would arrive at a collective understanding. The flexibility built into the deliberative model allowed the women's groups to establish the location and timings that best suited their needs. Typically, the centers were placed in a common location that was suitable for all community members to attend meetings, and one where mothers would also feel comfortable leaving their young ones for a few hours each day. As I observed in several villages, the women's groups had come to rely on the *balwadi* as a safe place of learning and childcare for their children. Each morning, they would leave their young ones at the center on their way out into the fields to perform agricultural labor.

The flexibility built into the *balwadi* program came into conflict with official rules and procedures, which required the centers to be relocated to the nearest primary school or else closed. By applying the same rules designed for the government's preschool program to USN's *balwadi* program, officials in Uttarakhand's education bureaucracy believed they were carrying out their duties. Meanwhile, according to USN and its grassroots network of local NGO partners and village women's groups, the state was effectively undoing twenty years of local collective action around early child education. Notwithstanding their praise for the USN's work, public officials were

¹⁶² Interview with Dr. Lalit Pande.

compelled to apply the preschool policy even-handedly, with no special consideration for the quality of the organization and its work.¹⁶³ The employees at USN understood that as a normal feature of doing business with the state. According to one of the managers of the *balwadi* program at USN:

*The bureaucracy cannot say that 'your organization is good or different.' They have to follow a standard rule... And once you get kicked out of the system, that's it.*¹⁶⁴

Given the bureaucracy's tendency to apply rules uniformly, organizations like USN drew the lesson that public officials in Uttarakhand possessed "*no concern about the quality of NGOs.*" In their eyes, the community-based nature of their work made no difference to the state. Public officials in Uttarakhand gave civic agencies like USN were accorded scant recognition for their grassroots credentials. Unlike their counterparts in Himachal Pradesh, who encouraged civic input into the planning process, civic agencies in Uttarakhand were effectively marginalized. As a result, officers at USN chose to avoid working alongside public agencies, and instead redirected their efforts towards working with communities more directly.

These findings are not unique to USN and its interactions with the education bureaucracy. Civic actors working across different policy domains shared similar experiences and perceptions regarding the state. Consider the experience of Mr. Dangwal, a retired school teacher and activist from Almora who had spent more than 25 years working on rural literacy and natural resource management with hill communities. An active participant of the Uttarakhand statehood movement during the 1970s, Dangwalji identified strongly with his village, the local environment and the hill region more generally. In 2001, Dangwalji and his collaborators formalized their efforts by establishing a grassroots NGO. The organization worked with communities to address critical issues such as water and forest management, early child education, and livelihood enhancement for the poor. As a former high school teacher, Dangwalji knew the challenges of building community ties with public agencies. Having been promoted through the organizational ranks, he ended his career as a lecturer and administrator at a leading government high school in the district. He thus possessed an insider's grasp of how the local bureaucracy worked, both before and after Uttarkhand split from Uttar Pradesh.

Among Dangwalji's first community mobilization efforts was for the World Bank's Swajal project, a village water management and sanitation program. The program was first implemented during the 1990s under the administrative aegis of the Uttar Pradesh Jal Nigam (Water Corporation). Against the top-down model of service delivery that prevailed within the state, the program advocated a more decentralized, participatory approach to water management. As part of the implementation effort for the Swajal project, Dangwalji and his associates worked with villagers to identify sustainable water sources and plan for the installation of safe water lines through their villages. When the time came, however, to carry out the installation of water lines, public officials disregarded the input of local communities:

The Jal Nigam had demarcated the forests and water sources according to maps that did not fit with the situation we saw on the ground. As a result, 90 percent of the water lines they created in our

¹⁶³ It helps to point out that officials in the education bureaucracy recognized the contributions of USN and viewed it as a dedicated civic agency working on behalf of underserved communities. Virtually every bureaucrat I interviewed praised the organization for its work in environmental education.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with program manager, Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi, District Almora, Uttarakhand.

*villages did not work. Instead of listening to communities, they pushed the people aside and worked by their own rules.*¹⁶⁵

While this is not the place to evaluate the performance of Swajal, Dangwalji's assessment of the program sheds light on how public agencies relate to everyday citizens.¹⁶⁶ Similar findings have been reported in studies of water conservation and forest management in Uttarakhand (Agrawal 1999; Bose 2000; CDS 2000). The state showed indifference, if not outright hostility, towards local communities in the governance of local natural resources.

Long before the state had any claim over Uttarakhand's forests, hill communities collectively governed forest land through informal forest councils.¹⁶⁷ Other local activists I interviewed had experience working with the forest bureaucracy, particularly in its program for Joint Forest Management, which was another attempt at participatory governance with World Bank support. The program aimed to protect forest land while strengthening the ties between hill communities and the state. In practice, however, the Forest Department became the dominant partner, unilaterally imposing rules and disempowering communities in the process.¹⁶⁸

Governance in the domain of primary education revealed similar pattern of exclusion by the state. Through their local NGO, Dangwalji and his associates had spent more than a decade organizing women's groups and working to strengthen community participation in village primary schools. As a school teacher himself, he understood the importance of establishing ties between community groups and village primary schools. Given the broad of male out-migration in much of the hill region, this meant establishing ties with mothers, who performed the majority of domestic duties such as water collection and agricultural labor, as well overseeing their children's' education. In contrast to Himachal Pradesh, however, the pattern of behavior in Uttarakhand's bureaucracy has been to ignore and override local demands and marginalize women from the implementation process.¹⁶⁹ As Dangwalji put it, the very idea of "people's participation" within the state became little more than a catchphrase:

*Now every official talks about "people's participation." But the administrative structure tells the people something else. It tells them, 'You stay seated, we are running everything'... And so communities have become hesitant to step forward. They have come to believe that their participation is not needed.*¹⁷⁰

It is important to emphasize once again that the education bureaucracy Uttarakhand were subject to the same formal accountability structures and had the same administrative blueprint for SSA and other primary education policies. These policies explicitly called for decentralization and the

¹⁶⁵ Interview with social activist, District Almora, Uttarakhand.

¹⁶⁶ According to a report commission by the World Bank evaluating the Swajal program: "Software, i.e., community development activities, tend to be totally ignored from the implementation phase onwards" and operation and maintenance are "viewed and addressed as a hardware issue to the neglect of its serious software implications." (CDS 2000:2)

¹⁶⁷ For a history of peasant resistance and the emergence of forest councils in Uttarakhand, see Guha (2000). On the social and political processes underlying collective forest management by van panchayats, as well as their relationship to the state, see Agrawal (2001) and Agrawal and Ostrom (2001).

¹⁶⁸ On Joint Forest Management's failure to empower local communities in Uttarakhand, see Corbridge and Jewitt (1997) and Sundar (2000).

¹⁶⁹ The bureaucracy's indifference towards the needs facing women, has also been well-documented (Joshi 2005).

¹⁷⁰ Interview with social activist, District Almora.

participation of local communities. As the following case studies will show, however, public officials adopted a narrow, legalistic interpretation of what participation meant. Local communities were welcome to participate in primary schooling so long as their influence over implementation was contained.

4.6. Nested Cases of Implementation

Having established above the persistence of legalism within the bureaucracy, I now turn to showing how norms drive policy implementation outcomes in Uttarakhand. This section analyzes two nested case studies of policy implementation. The first case involves the implementation of teacher placement and monitoring policies. The findings are drawn from multi-level fieldwork conducted within the state bureaucracy, local district bureaucracy and primary school. The bureaucracy's legalistic application of teacher rationalization and monitoring policies encourages both school teachers and parents to circumvent the bureaucracy and identify informal channels for addressing their respective needs. The second case tests the mechanisms of my theory at the village level. I examine community governance over primary schooling in the village of Silam Ghat, a setting where one would expect primary education to be well-implemented. The case probes whether and how legalism weakens local collective action to produce worse outcomes for implementation. The case also helps us understand the phenomenon of exit from the government primary schools in Uttarakhand. Taken together, these two cases aim to demonstrate that the bureaucracy's legalistic approach to implementation produces inferior outcomes, and may even undermine its long-run capacity to govern the education system.

4.6.1. *The Legalistic Danda: Monitoring School Teachers from Dehradun to Almora*

Against the backdrop of its noteworthy school infrastructure expansion, the primary education system in Uttarakhand suffers from severe and persistent gaps in service delivery. These gaps are reflected in the high rate of teacher absence, high incidence of single-teacher schools, and poor student learning outcomes, which were presented earlier. Yet the depressing statistics associated with outcomes may even not scratch the surface of how poorly Uttarakhand's school system actually functions.

Intensive qualitative fieldwork conducted in District Almora, located in the high literacy Kumaon region of the state, revealed a breakdown in governance. Cases included routine teacher lateness and absence, along with a failure to keep watch over school children, let alone teach. Some violations were even more egregious. During unannounced primary school visits conducted across the district, I observed teachers intoxicated during school hours on three separate occasions.¹⁷¹ Alert to these deficiencies, senior officials within the education bureaucracy responded by imposing tighter rules and additional checks on both school teachers and local officials. As some of these

¹⁷¹ That the teachers involved showed little sign of hesitation or alarm when approached by an external researcher raises the question of how far such behaviors have become normalized within Uttarakhand's primary school system. During fieldwork, I was alerted to many more such cases by parents residing in other villages, many of whom felt incapable of doing anything.

officials put it, the state needed to “*apply the danda [stick]*” over the school system to improve the delivery of primary education.

Stricter monitoring procedures notwithstanding, the state has proven incapable of addressing the root causes underlying poor service delivery. After separating from Uttar Pradesh, one might have expected Uttarakhand’s education bureaucracy to govern the primary school system more effectively. Strong demand for education combined with a history of local collective action across the state would suggest a high degree of public vigilance as well. Yet in contrast to the pattern observed in Himachal Pradesh, where the education bureaucracy actively promoted input from local communities in the monitoring process, parents and community groups in Uttarakhand report exclusion from the state and a strong sense of disempowerment.

The findings presented in this section show how legalistic norms within the state shape bureaucratic behaviors and civic action in the monitoring process within the primary education system. Data gathered from interviews with public officials, participant observation within the education bureaucracy and village-level ethnography reveal a system of top-down monitoring that relies mostly on school inspections and other official feedback channels, while marginalizing feedback from local communities and civic groups.

Chief among the problems facing Uttarakhand’s primary school system is the prevalence of schools staffed by only one school teacher. According to the ASER survey data presented earlier, single-teacher schools account for approximately one fifth of government primary schools in the state. That is more than twice the proportion in neighboring Himachal Pradesh, which faces very similar geographic conditions. One might suppose that the problem reflected a numerical lack of school teachers in Uttarakhand, in which case the gap could be filled by recruiting more teachers. However, the aggregate ratio of students to teachers, Uttarakhand performs nearly as well as Himachal Pradesh. The difficulty lies in the skewed distribution of school teachers across primary schools. A senior official in the Department of Education explained the problem:

*In remote areas, people say there are no teachers, whereas in the plains area there is a surplus of teachers. But this is not because we face a shortage. If you look at it closely, our [teacher:student] ratio is one of the best in the country. At the primary school level it is 1 teacher per 14 or 15 students. So the number of teachers here is more than in other states. Now our objective is to rationalize these teachers. And for that we have a policy to send teachers to deficit regions.*¹⁷²

The majority of single-teacher schools in Uttarakhand are located in villages far from major towns and motor roads. Many are scattered across the upper hill region of the state, locations that school teachers find unattractive. By comparison, the primary schools serving roadside villages, the lower hills and the plains region bordering Uttar Pradesh exhibit an overflow of school teachers. To reverse the tide in favor of underserved regions and villages, the education bureaucracy attempted to implement a teacher rationalization policy. According to the same official:

Most teachers want to get transferred from the interior hills to the lower hills and plains. Transfers are not happening from the plains back up to the hills. We felt that teacher transfers must be two-way. It should not be like rain water flowing down the hills... We instituted a rationalization policy barring teachers from migrating from the upper hills down to the plains. We also prepared a

¹⁷² Interview with Senior Official, Department of Education, Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

*list of teachers who have been serving in prime locations like Dehradun and Haridwar continuously for last 15 years. These individuals were asked to serve in more remote areas next. We also blocked any movement of teachers to city centers and schools located in roadside villages.*¹⁷³

The attempt at teacher rationalization was not unique to Uttarakhand. A similar policy was instituted in Himachal Pradesh, which also faced a similar challenge of serving the remote hill regions of the state. Yet the process of implementation there was different in important respects.

Recall that in Himachal Pradesh, rationalization took place gradually and in a phased manner, through joint consultation with local bureaucrats and MLAs. Drawing on local bureaucratic input, senior officials mapped out regions of the state where the bureaucracy had greater support from school teachers and local communities. They targeted those regions on a pilot basis first and drew lessons for how to extend the policy statewide. Importantly, local bureaucrats identified the political barriers and logistical challenges to enforcement within their respective districts, sharing critical information to senior officials, which then fed back into the implementation process. The gradual and broadly consultative approach enabled the state to learn over time and adapt the rationalization policy based on varying local conditions. The initial phase of implementation also gave school teachers and other stakeholders an opportunity to observe the policy's practical consequences.

The attempt at teacher rationalization in Uttarakhand took a very different turn. The policy was instituted uniformly across the state with little deliberation. Apart from high-level policy discussions with political leadership in Dehradun, senior officials within the education bureaucracy saw little need to incorporate broader participation from within the bureaucracy. No consultation took place with local officials and those closer to the ground had no opportunity to share their perspectives over the challenges of implementation. According to senior officials, the gaps in service delivery had come about because the system was too “loose” (*dhila*) and the state too porous to outside influence, allowing local politics to infect the lower echelons of the bureaucracy. Meanwhile, primary school teachers, upon whom the *danda* of rationalization was to be applied, had little input over the proposed changes. Senior officials sought to contain the influence of school teachers, whose “malfeasance” they associated with the gaps in service delivery. For example, some officials cited the prevalence of bogus medical claims made by school teachers seeking to obtain transfers to more comfortable locations. As another senior bureaucrat explained:

*The teachers have become so smart. They get a fake parchee [injury slip] made by the doctor from a recognized medical institution in New Delhi. They feign illness and submit the investigative paper of the doctor to ask for a transfer. That is the kind of malfeasance we wanted to stop. A local officer who does not understand the game may unknowingly accept the doctor's injury slip. Or worse even, he may be part of the game. So we took the matter out of their [local officials] hands. We informed school teachers and their doctors that they must appear before a medical board at the state level. So transfer requests based on medical grounds would be subject to the state medical board. This sent the message that they cannot evade our scrutiny.*¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Interview with Senior Official, Department of Education, Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Senior Official, Department of Education, Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

Senior officials in Uttarakhand sought to tighten the state's grip over the education system through the institutions of more rules and even heavier top-down monitoring. The allocation of school teachers would only become more balanced with pressure for clear and consistent rule enforcement.

A legalistic approach was also taken to address problems of teacher absence and poor quality teaching. By tightening formal checks and monitoring procedures, senior officials believed the school system could be made more accountable. Recognizing that local bureaucrats could not realistically inspect every classroom within an administrative district, senior officials developed what they believed was a simpler and more effective method for monitoring. Primary school teachers were required to maintain an official diary, which detailed their daily lesson plan and what was covered in class. The diary would be maintained by teachers, checked over by the school headmaster, and made available at any time for inspection by local bureaucrats. According to senior officials, the diary was not only more efficient, but also provided a fair and impartial method for monitoring school teachers:

*The purpose behind the diary is twofold. First, to make them [school teachers] more accountable at the school, they have to fill the diary every day. And the school headmaster has to note down their remarks every two weeks. Now suppose I [a local official] want to go and inspect a school. I don't have to ask the teacher, "What have you done?" I can go straight to the diary. Fabricated entry in a daily diary is tough to do, like say on a monthly basis. So we instructed all the [local] officers to check the daily diary. And if the teacher has not filled it, they should report that to us as per the results of their inspection. The second point is that the system also protects school teachers. If they are abruptly absent or for some reason unavailable on the day of inspection, their diary is still there for checking. This protects them from suspension.*¹⁷⁵

The monitoring system in Uttarakhand gave priority to official documentation, removing the need for any dialogue between local officials and school teachers. In addition to daily diaries, the education bureaucracy instituted a formal complaint system for parents. The contact number for local officials in the education bureaucracy was painted visibly outside every primary school, and similarly, the phone numbers of every school headmaster and gram pradhan of the village panchayat was made available to the local officials. The purpose behind the system was to enable parents to inform the bureaucracy immediately if anything went wrong at the school, allowing local officials to confirm any reports and respond quickly.

Once rationalization was instituted, senior officials remained alert to the possibility that some school teachers may find ways to circumvent the policy at the local-level. Their concern was not without substance. Consider findings from the local education bureaucracy in Dehradun District, where officials enjoyed close physical proximity to bureaucratic leadership in the state Secretariat. Several months after teacher rationalization was instituted, I observed the daily influx of school teachers at the local education bureaucracy in the attempt to secure a transfer. Local officials stationed in Dehradun lauded the effort by senior officials to tighten the state's control over the school system, and believed that consistent application of the policy helped protect them from the vagaries of local politics. As one official observed:

Ever since it [rationalization] was announced, we've had a long line of teachers coming here every day asking for a transfer... They are using any means possible to work around the policy. But I

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Senior Official, Department of Education, Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

*keep telling him that my hands are tied. The orders are for me not to conduct any transfers except those directed from above... Teachers are unhappy with it, but they see that I am only applying the policy given to me. Nobody can blame me for doing my job.*¹⁷⁶

For these local bureaucrats, teacher rationalization offered a safeguard against complaints. By deferring to the authority of officials stationed higher up the bureaucratic hierarchy, they no longer had to exercise judgment over individual cases. Consistent enforcement from above also made it more difficult for school teachers to level charges of prejudice or preferential treatment against local bureaucrats.

Rationalization did not discourage school teachers from attempting to secure desirable teaching posts. According to local officials in Dehradun, their office faced a backlog of transfer-related requests from school teachers, many of whom resisted being transferred by the bureaucracy without at least making their case. On several occasions, I observed teachers arrive at the district office accompanied by relatives and other associates claiming to have an “*approach*,” local parlance for political connections. In one typical case, a school teacher arrived at the district office in the morning accompanied by her brother. He tried to persuade the local officials there to transfer her from a rural primary school to one based closer to the capital city center of Dehradun. Later that afternoon, one of the concerned officials narrated the case further:

*You saw that brother and sister sitting here earlier? She is a school teacher, and he came along doing netagiri [playing politics] on her behalf. Last time she was here asking for a transfer on the grounds that her children were studying in Dehradun. Now this time, her bother shared his political contacts with us and asked again for her transfer. I sent them away, but how long can that continue? This is the third time I have seen her this month... You just watch, next time they come he will have found a way to get the transfer order made, and someone on top will instruct me what to do.*¹⁷⁷

Having handled cases like this on a routine basis, local bureaucrats were also aware of various loopholes in the system. Some teachers, for instance, had found a way to delay a transfer order by lodging a formal petition with the state. These delays came at a great cost. Local communities that expressed the demand for an additional teacher could be left waiting for months at a time. Given the educational cycle for primary schooling, that would imply the loss of a full academic year. Manipulation of the system by school teachers connected to politicians posed a threat to effective implementation.

Yet manipulation was not the concern on the minds of local officials in Dehradun. As rationalization proceeded across the state, cases had come up in their office involving school teachers with disabilities who had been transferred to interior villages. Such cases left local officials in a quandary. While they wanted to help school teachers with legitimate needs, they risked censure for not abiding by official procedures. As one local bureaucrat in Dehradun explained:

They [senior officials] have come up with a good policy. But I doubt it can work across the entire state. Already we are seeing problems... We are out here explaining to the school teachers that we cannot make any concessions for anyone... But how do I explain to a sixty year old headmaster who has

¹⁷⁶ Local official, District Education Office, Dehradun.

¹⁷⁷ Local official, District Education Office, Dehradun.

*difficulty walking why he was transferred to a school in some far flung village? How do I tell him that I cannot do anything for his case? And there are many, many cases like his.*¹⁷⁸

Unable to adapt the policy to address such cases and meet the needs of school teachers frustrated local officials. News of such cases also spread among the school teacher community in Dehradun, raising the risk of local political backlash. While local officials understood the purpose behind tightening the transfer system, the pressure for uniform implementation made it difficult for them to distinguish between cases of manipulation and genuine needs facing some teachers.

One might suppose that the conditions facing the local education bureaucracy in Dehradun were driven by idiosyncratic factors. As the administrative capital of the state, local officials there may have faced inordinate pressure to demonstrate that they were implementing policies in a fair and consistent manner. To probe the mechanisms of my theory further, I conducted local-level fieldwork away from the state capital in District Almora. I selected District Almora for a few critical reasons. First, Almora was historically considered one of India's most educationally forward districts. The district's triumvirate of Brahmins—*Pant, Pandey and Joshi*—were renowned for their attachment to education. Second, as I discussed at the outset of the chapter, Almora was also a historical center of political consciousness within erstwhile Uttar Pradesh. The national freedom fighter and first Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Govind Ballabh Pant, came from this district, as did several other senior statesmen. Finally, the British had a significant presence in District Almora and the Kumaon region more broadly. The region was the recruitment grounds for the Kumaon Regiment of the Indian army, a factor that some suggest helped further the demand for schooling.¹⁷⁹

The above considerations generate the expectation that local public agencies should be effective in implementing education in Almora. Although they were relatively far from the capital Dehradun, local officials in Almora's education bureaucracy articulated similar pressures to apply the *danda* on school teachers while implementing rationalization and monitoring policies. There were penalties involved in attempting to intervene on behalf of individual school teachers. In Dwarahat, a far-flung administrative block of Almora, education officials discussed the pressures they faced to implement teacher rationalization in a uniform and consistent manner. As one block-level official explained:

*The fact is that teachers come to us for help. Even to expedite their pay, they ask us if we can get it done for them. They have less direct contact with the district [administration], and even less with the state. Since we are the local people, naturally they approach us first. But sometime they don't realize that we can't bend the rules for them. Take the primary school at the end of that road. It has 96 children, but only one person teaching. The headmaster has been asking us to send an additional teacher, again and again for the last year. But it is on the roadside, so the same issue of 'sugam-durgam' [accessible versus remote location] comes up, and rationalization [policy] doesn't allow it. I brought this issue up before at the district, but if I press it again and again, it draws too much attention.*¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Focus group discussion, District Education Office, Dehradun.

¹⁷⁹ These factors also make District Almora comparable to District Shimla of Himachal Pradesh, examined in the previous chapter.

¹⁸⁰ Interview, Block Resource Coordinator, District Almora.

The same office shared with me the list of accessible (*sugam*) and remote (*durgam*) primary schools within their administrative block. The classification was based on the walking distance between the school and a motor road. The primary school that referred to above had only recently been connected to a road. Notwithstanding the official student enrollment of 96, the school's proximity to a road made it unqualified to receive new school teachers. While they expressed the importance of applying the rules, local bureaucrats were also concerned that certain ground realities of implementation in Dwarahat were not reaching senior officials.

I later visited the same school and found the enrollment rate to be 94 students. The school headmaster, who had been teaching there for close to six years, discussed with me his immense frustrations with having to run the school by himself. He also recognized the pressures that local officials faced to apply teacher rationalization without exception.

*Officers have come here regularly for monitoring visits. And each time I have told them that we need another teacher...they can see that themselves. But what can they do? This area is considered sugam. Rules come from above, and they must follow that. They have to send their monitoring report back up [the hierarchy]. I can't blame them...You see the newly built room back there? They [local officials] came and had it built. Plus we got a new kitchen shed, and water...all these things are part of their duty.*¹⁸¹

According to this school teacher, the education bureaucracy's monitoring system operating the same way whether the issue was school infrastructure, the Midday Meal program, or even teaching. Local officials had inspections to conduct and a duty to make sure that certain official criteria were met. Action taken beyond that could not be expected.

Yet many school teachers in Almora raised objections to the monitoring process and the way rationalization was being carried out by the education bureaucracy. As part of fieldwork in Almora, I conducted ethnographic interviews and group discussions with school teachers. These often took place at local tea stalls based near bus stations. School teachers would often gather at tea stalls before leaving for school in the morning, and again unwind together over a cup of *chai* in the evenings after work. The conversations with school teachers shed much light on the frustrations they had with the bureaucracy, as well their attempts to work around them. Although the state had an official set of rules, which most teachers could easily recite, most school teachers felt that the implementation process lacked transparency. The bureaucracy's uniform approach to implementation was not seen as particularly fair either. Many believed the system favored those who were well-connected or adept at finding official loopholes to circumvent the policy. Over the course of one conversation, a school teacher expressed the sentiments shared by his fellow colleagues:

*They tell us the policy is transparent. But how do we know that? They make all the decisions in Dehradun. Nobody asks us what we think about it. Even those in the union have no say. Only the one's involved in politics [netagiri], they seem to benefit. The everyday teacher [aam adhyapak], he has to face the rules no matter what...So that means we should also look out for ourselves.*¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Interview with Primary School Headmaster, Dwarahat, District Almora.

¹⁸² Focus Group Discussion, government school teachers, Dwarahat, District Almora.

Many school teachers approached rationalization with skepticism. Stories had circulated of young, able-bodied teachers obtaining desirable posts, while those suffering from disability or other serious ailments such as cancer were being sent to teach in far flung villages. The extent to which these stories were true is unclear. Yet the frequency and intensity with which they came up during interviews suggests that these stories were high on the minds of school teachers. The local bureaucracy was unable to arrest these concerns and articulate to them how decisions were actually being made, leaving many uncomfortable.

Unable to address their needs with the local bureaucracy, school teachers in Almora came to view the policy with distrust. Concerns regarding the state's inflexibility went beyond rank and file school teachers. Interviews conducted with local leaders of the teachers' union in Almora revealed wider misgivings with the state's approach. Union leaders experienced difficulty maintaining unity among school teachers, who sought their individual means to secure their teaching posts.

The problem is like this...I am the local head of the union. I want to unite the teachers and form a single voice. The government order said no new transfers for three years. But then just four months later we saw those who are connected getting transfers. The 10-15 percent involved in netagiri [politics], those teachers are able to get things done. The rest are affected by this. They are all left wondering, "Who is listening to us?" And when we can't get things done for them, they look for other ways.¹⁸³

The concerns expressed by union leaders were not without merit. School teachers I interviewed felt that the bureaucracy failed to distinguish between the genuine needs of some teacher and cases involving *netagiri*. To add to that, school teachers did not believe they could make their case directly to the state. Similar to what I observed in District Dehradun, school teachers who came to the local bureaucracy in Almora seeking information regarding their transfer cases would often be turned away.

What appeared from inside the bureaucracy to be consistent rule application was to many school teachers an inaccessible and opaque administrative process. The education bureaucracy's legalistic approach to implementation left teachers in Almora insecure about their positions. While local bureaucrats were explicit about not having any authorization to discuss individual cases, it was unclear when and how transfers decisions were being made. The bureaucracy offered little insight on the decision-making process, which seemed to rely heavily on senior officials in Dehradun. Meanwhile, the lack of transparency gave local politicians the opportunity to manipulate school teachers. As I learned over the course of interviews and focus group discussions, teachers would "tie up" with local politicians in the hopes of gaining input on their transfer cases. As one school teacher explained:

Vidhayakji [local elected official] came around asking us to get things done for him. We agreed since we may get transferred otherwise. We don't know what the status of our [transfer] cases really is. So we tied up with him in the meantime. We are hoping that that, one way or another, it will help...Our transfer hasn't happened yet, so maybe it is helping.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Interview with Local Union Official, District Almora.

¹⁸⁴ Focus Group Discussion, Government school teachers, Dwarahat, District Almora.

The relations between teachers and local politicians ranged from (illegal) campaigning to paying outright bribes. Although it was difficult to assess from my fieldwork the full extent of such practices, teachers across Almora mentioned the importance of maintaining connections to local politicians (*neta log*), if for no other reason to at least have some recognition (*jan-pahchan*) within the state. That said, school teachers found political tie-ups no less murky, as it was unclear who among them who truly was benefitting. Consequently, school teachers pursued whatever means possible to work around the state, which in turn made it even more difficult for public officials to decipher between cases.

School teachers were not the only stakeholders that viewed the implementation process with skepticism. Parents and local communities found it even more difficult to voice their concerns to the state. The process for school monitoring took on a legalistic mode that marginalized local participation. Focus group discussions conducted with parents and village community groups across Almora, revealed that they rarely made use of the official complaint process. Parents believed the system carried too many risks and offered few rewards. Lodging an official complaint was a lengthy process and the end result was not guaranteed. In the meantime, the day-to-day relations between parents and school teachers would come under strain. Parents felt it was better to avoid creating hostilities, since teachers might even take their frustrations out on the school children.

If the official complaint system was non-ideal, how then did local communities respond to problems like teacher absence? Take the case of the primary school in Danoli, a village located far from a motor road in the administrative block of Dwarahat. Danoli was a considerable journey from the town center of Dwarahat, involving an hour-long bus ride followed by an hour and a half hike through the hills. Yet even in this far-flung village of Almora, parents were eager to educate their children. Danoli's primary school had only one officially appointed school teacher, who was also the school's headmaster. The headmaster had been due to retire soon, and according to parents, he had increasingly been ignoring his teaching duties. Often, he would arrive to school late, fail to monitor what students were doing, and sometimes even drink during school hours.

On my first visit to Danoli, I asked residents to direct me to the primary school. A mother who was outside performing agricultural work gestured towards a white building uphill. As I turned towards the path heading uphill, a few young men alerted me to the fact that the school headmaster was not there. When I asked where he was, they smiled and pointed towards a construction site where the village temple was being renovated. Making my way to the temple, I found the school headmaster sitting inside a tea stall, sipping on *chai* and smoking *bhang*, the local marijuana. After introducing myself as a researcher, the headmaster's bloodshot eyes lit up and he began sharing with me various details about the primary school. He recited to me the standard information that local officials typically inquire about when conducting school inspections—the school's enrollment rate, number of classrooms and infrastructure, the condition of the Midday Meal program, and so on. He even offered to share with me his daily diary, the latest monitoring mechanism that had been instituted by the state.

While the young men working at the temple were amused by the headmaster, parents in Danoli expressed serious dismay. They later narrated to me their various attempts to curb the headmaster's dereliction. A group of concerned mothers, who had formed a women's association in the village, first tried reasoning with him. They organized meetings at the primary school between the headmaster and all the parents, but the headmaster showed little interest. Before the education bureaucracy had instituted the official complaint line, some parents brought up the idea of going to

the block administration to complain and request a new headmaster. In a focus group discussion, one of the mothers recounted their experience:

That old headmaster, he just remains intoxicated. He would fall asleep in school while the students were running around, breaking things. You will see the roof is broken because kids threw stones at it while he was sleeping... We held charcha [discussions] about this with the other parents... Dealing with the administration is full of roadblocks. First we must get there, which can take half the day. By the time our number is called, we may have to stay overnight. And then we may have to go back again and file more paperwork, and wait longer for the administration to respond. Still, we used all means we had to request a new school teacher. Bichara Gram Pradhan [Poor village council head], even he grew tired of writing letters!¹⁸⁵

After a full academic year had gone by, the news finally reached back that Danoli's primary school qualified for an additional teaching post since it was classified as remote according to the rationalization policy. However, the timeframe was unclear, as there were other schools in the area that may have been ahead in the queue. I asked the parents if anyone among them knew about the official complaint (*shikayat*) system. A few of the mothers pointed towards the primary school building, where the local education bureaucracy's phone number had been painted on the wall outside. Though they had not made use of the system before, parents had little faith in its effectiveness. As one father went on to say:

I have heard how this happens in other schools. Guardians can call to make a complaint. But then the teacher can also complain against us and say that he is being harassed. How will the administration decide who to side with? Why will they take our word over the teacher? One party complains and then another complains... These cases can drag on at the administration. And anyhow, who wants to make enemies?¹⁸⁶

The hesitation around using the official complaint line had substance. Disputes between parents and school teachers could take time to resolve. In some cases, legalism gave teachers a clear advantage, like in the example of Pujari, where the school teacher belonging to the Scheduled Caste (SC) community registered a harassment case against the parents, in violation of the SC Act. Rather than take on the risks associated with a legalistic complaint process, parents in Dahal decided to address the matter informally within the village. The women's group mobilized families come together and raise funds to appoint a local high school graduate as a second teacher. While the government school teacher spent his mornings at the tea stall, the informal teacher appointed by the community effectively ran the government primary school.

The above findings demonstrate how legalistic norms shape the implementation process for teacher rationalization and school monitoring. Bureaucrats abide by official rules and procedures in carrying out these tasks, while school teachers and parents learn to adjust their expectations and strategies accordingly. In cases like the Village Danoli, communities pursue alternative strategies to work around the state. However, we have yet to fully test the mechanism through which legalism is hypothesized to produce poor quality education, namely, the obstruction of local collective action. Does legalism counteract the collective efforts of local communities around primary schooling? The village case study of Silam Ghat takes up this question.

¹⁸⁵ Focus Group Discussion with Parents, Village Danoli, Dwarahat, District Almora.

¹⁸⁶ Focus Group Discussion with Parents, Village Danoli, Dwarahat, District Almora.

4.6.2. Collective Action Falls Apart: The Case of Silam Ghat

The findings presented so far have shown that legalistic norms influence how public officials carry out school monitoring and teacher rationalization. The mechanism of bureaucratic behavior to outcomes associated with poor implementation. In this section, I test the mechanisms of my theory further down the chain of governance. Does legalism weaken civic participation, as hypothesized, to yield inferior implementation outcomes? To test whether and how legalistic norms discourage local collective action around primary education, I now turn to findings from the village level. As the case study of Silam Ghat will demonstrate, local public agencies in Uttarakhand undermine the participation of local communities weakening the delivery of primary education. In contrast to their counterparts in neighboring Himachal Pradesh, local officials in Uttarakhand thwart the collective demands of women's associations organized around education. Their behavior marginalizes local communities, encouraging families to exit the government school system.

Silam Ghat (pop. 503) was in many ways a typical village within Almora District. Residents relied on a combination of subsistence agriculture and financial remittances. I selected Silam Ghat as a fieldwork site because theoretically, it was setting where one would expect primary schooling to be implemented well. A predominantly upper caste village situated only 12 km from the market center of the administrative block of Dwarahat, the village was accessible by local bus, making it well-connected to the administrative block, where local public agencies were based. The primary school in Silam Ghat was located just a short walk uphill from the main road leading to Dwarahat, and thus offered a highly accessible (and desirable) posting for school teachers. Based on the village population, caste composition, and its favorable location, Silam Ghat's primary school was also more likely to receive attention from public agencies.

According to residents of Silam Ghat, the village had historically shown strong demand for education. Many of its residents were employed by local public agencies, including some high school teachers, military officers, and a handful of private business owners. A household survey I conducted in the village found that every family had access to agricultural land, and there were no cases of landless laborers. Nevertheless, landholdings had become increasingly fragmented as inherited land had been divided up among siblings over each successive generation. Residents of Silam Ghat found that agriculture was no longer a sustainable source of livelihood and that employment prospects were much better outside of Almora District.

In line with the broader pattern in the Almora District, Silam Ghat had been undergoing rapid out-migration. The same village survey revealed that close to 40 percent of households that once resided in the village had either moved out or were in the process of relocating outside Silam Ghat. In many other cases, younger men had migrated with one or more of their children, while their wives and the elderly stayed back to tend to the house and farmland. The remaining 60 percent of households that continued to reside in Silam Ghat had at least one (usually male) family member living outside the village and sending money back to support the family. Migrating households resettled in nearby cities such as Haldwani and Rudrapur, located in the plains areas bordering Uttar Pradesh. Some went as far as the National Capital Region (NCR) around New Delhi.

Silam Ghat also had favorable community characteristics and relations. The village was divided into two *toks*, or hamlets, each belonging to a different caste community. An upper caste *Thakur* community, who made up 70 percent of Silam Ghat's population, lived in a much larger hamlet on one side of the village, while a Dalit community (*Arya*) resided on the opposite side. Between the two hamlets ran the main road connecting the village to the center of Dwarahat. Notwithstanding their physical segregation, relations between the two caste communities in Silam Ghat were by all accounts harmonious, and they had history of cross-caste cooperation. For example, when deciding where to place the village primary school, residents from both hamlets worked together to identify a location that was mutually accessible. And contrary to what one might have expected, they collectively agreed to place the school much closer to the Dalit hamlet, which made it easier for children from that community to reach the school.¹⁸⁷

Silam Ghat's favorable civic characteristics were further evident in the number and quality of local associations within the village. Silam Ghat boasted a women's association (*mahila mangal dal*) that had been operating for nearly twenty years. In addition, a much older village forest council (*van panchayat*) had been involved in managing the collection of firewood and preservation of forest land and resources. Finally, two women's Self Help Groups, involved in collective savings, had been recently established in the village. At the time of fieldwork, all four of these organizations were active and well-functioning.

Notwithstanding the favorable conditions of Silam Ghat, parents in the village were deeply distressed with the educational scenario at the government primary school. In terms of physical infrastructure, the primary school appeared to be excellent condition. A freshly painted building housed on a pretty campus, the school possessed all of the physical facilities provided under India's education policy. Although the school was originally established in 1958, the building had been upgraded with the construction of three brand new classrooms, a kitchen, campus boundary wall, and separate bathrooms for boys and girls. Official enrollment at the school was 38 students, though I counted ten additional children below primary school age who attended daily.¹⁸⁸ Meanwhile, there was only one teacher posted at the school, who was also the school's headmaster. In addition to administrative work, he was in charge of teaching all five grades, which he found next to impossible. A second teaching post for the school had been sanctioned but remained vacant. As the school teacher explained: "*We have tried again and again, but we are unable to do anything about the lack of teachers.*"

By the time I arrived for fieldwork in Silam Ghat, collective action around primary schooling had also been on the wane. Some families addressed the teaching gap by sending their children to private tutoring during after-school hours. Others had placed their children in a private school that had opened nearby. The school ran for a few years but then closed down recently after the school headmaster moved out of Silam Ghat. As one father explained,

Our primary school is in a bad state. The shishu mandir [private school] was better. At least it had a full staff of four teachers. It ran for only two years and then stopped because Masterji moved

¹⁸⁷ To reach the primary school, children from the Thakur community had to hike down from their hamlet and cross a narrow stream, *madua* (buckwheat) fields, and the major roadway, before hiking back uphill.

¹⁸⁸ According to the school teacher, some families sent their little ones there for preschool, which according to official policy was supposed to be integrated with the primary school. In reality, however, the preschool continued to operate at its original location on the other side of the village.

*from the area...So now I'm sending them [the children] once again to the [government] primary school. But the teacher hardly has time to teach. The kids run around here and there. And he's too busy doing paperwork to pay attention to them.*¹⁸⁹

A few of the wealthier families in the village, particularly those who had experienced life outside of Silam Ghat, chose to exit the government system altogether. They began sending their children to a private school located further away from Silam Ghat.

The poor educational services could not be attributed to a lack of civic engagement by the community. If anything, local collective action is what kept the government primary school afloat. Silam Ghat had an active women's association (*mahila mangal dal*) that helped organize parents in the village around early child education for close to two decades. The group first took shape organically in 1990, as women from the village faced a common set of environmental challenges related to water and forest resources. With the depletion of local water sources, the scarcity of water was acutely felt throughout the hill region. Yet the burden fell disproportionately on women, who had to traverse long distances through the hills to fetch water. As one of the group members explained:

*We faced big problems with water. Many of the sources around us were drying up and we looked for alternatives. Depending on the rains, the water would get dried up in some fields within our village while in other places it would overflow. So as a group we discussed how to address this problem. We figured out a way to coordinate and jointly manage water...If there was too much water in one person's farm, others with less water would go collect water from there, and next time when that person had less water she could collect from others' farms. That way we set rules amongst each other.*¹⁹⁰

The women came to similar informal arrangements for the collection of grass from the forest. Used primarily as fodder for livestock, forest grass around Silam Ghat had undergone rapid depletion, which affected not only the forest ecosystem but the daily lives of women and young girls, who faced the burden of grass collection, and had to walk ever longer distances into the forest to find suitable grass. To allow the grass to regenerate in the forest, the women's association developed informal regulations for how much grass could be collected by each family, and from which areas of the forest. The responsibility for enforcement was shared by the entire group. Taking turns on a monthly basis, each group member and her family was responsible for monitoring forest usage and report cases to the group if anyone broke the rules. Over the years, this informal system of collective forest management helped to sustain Silam Ghat's forest while enabling the women to spend less time on wood and grass collection.

By the mid-1990s, the women's association in Silam Ghat assumed a more formal identity. The group came in contact with a local NGO that had been working with women's groups in other villages nearby. The Society for Environmental Education and Rural Development (SEED) was a grassroots body consisting of community organizers and concerned citizens (including some school teachers) who belonged to villages in the surrounding area.¹⁹¹ The members of SEED had witnessed the growth of informal women's groups across Dwarahat and aimed to strengthen their

¹⁸⁹ Interview with father, Silam Ghat.

¹⁹⁰ Focus Group Discussion, Women's Association, Silam Ghat.

¹⁹¹ SEED was formally registered as a nonprofit organization in 1992. To learn more about the organization and its work, see: <http://seedsunadi.blogspot.com>.

organizational capabilities. SEED conducted meetings in Silam Ghat, helping the women mobilize collectively around various policy domains such as labor, environment and education.¹⁹² The issue of early child daycare and education was especially salient for young mothers, as they faced the strenuous demands child rearing while also having to perform the full gamut of domestic labor and agricultural work. The organizers at SEED were also in partnership with Uttarakhand Sewa Nidhi, the environmental NGO that ran a *balwadi* (preschool) program mentioned earlier in the chapter.

With guidance from SEED and Uttarakhand Sewa Nidhi, the women's association in Silam Ghat developed a *balwadi* in their village. The center offered preschool education and daycare for young children. Residents of Silam Ghat saw the *balwadi* as a community center and ran it collectively. A physical space for the center was donated by an elderly resident of the village, whose sister-in-law belonged to the women's group. Meanwhile, the women donated their labor (*ksbhamdan*) to build and decorate the center so that it would be attractive for the children. The preschool was staffed with two young women from the village who were in the process of completing high school.

Almost a decade prior to the Indian state's adoption of universal primary education policy, families in Silam Ghat were educating their children at the *balwadi*. Once policies like SSA came into being, funding for Uttarakhand Sewa Nidhi's *balwadi* program was shut down by the state government. The women's group then converted the *balwadi* into an afterschool and recreational center (*sandya kendra*) for young children. The afterschool program was run by a young woman from the village, who at the time was completing her college degree. Through activity-based learning, educational songs and games, the center brought children of different ages together. Mothers in the village were content knowing that their children were spending time after school in a safe, educational environment.

Village collective action soon spread to Silam Ghat's primary school. That had not always been the case. With the creation of a Village Education Committee (VEC) under SSA, school meetings would take place between the headmaster and pradhan of the gram panchayat, with little input from parents. As the women's group became more active at the school, they learned to participate in VEC meetings. As one of the mothers recollected:

*Before our group became active in through balwadi, women didn't sit together. We would never attend official meetings or sit alongside the men. We didn't even know that meetings took place at the primary school. But now the situation has reversed. We all come forward and attend school meetings. Now the women don't let the men speak!*¹⁹³

With the collective vigilance of the women's association, residents in Silam Ghat were able to identify problems at the school and achieve some positive changes. As several parents reported, the school headmaster would often arrive late and sit in his office, failing to look after the children, let alone teach. He would also levy fees on the students to maintain the school computer, which was

¹⁹² Consider a more recent example of collective action from the domain of labor. When the Indian government launched its National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), a scheme that provided 100 guaranteed days of employment to rural households, the women came together to decide how NREGA should be allotted among families. Since a full 100 days of work for each family was unavailable in practice, they agreed to distribute NREGA work evenly across families. For a given NREGA project, each family in the village would get the opportunity to perform six days of work on a rotating basis.

¹⁹³ Focus Group Discussion, Women's Association, Silam Ghat.

hardly ever used. The women's association came together to discuss these issues and organized residents to put pressure on the school headmaster to abolish the fees, and make sure he arrived on time and looked after the school children.

The women's association also took the initiative to monitor the Midday Meal program at the primary school. Food grains and other essential supplies for the lunch program would fail to reach the school regularly. On some occasions, the headmaster would have the students go collect food grains from the ration house and carry them back to the school, much to the dismay of parents. Members from the women's association began to collectively monitor the school lunch program, taking turns to make sure that the food was prepared daily under hygienic conditions, and that the school children were no longer being enlisted in collecting food grains. Meanwhile, complaints about the meal program had reached the local education bureaucracy as well. As the school headmaster pointed out, local officials paid unannounced visits to the school. Their inspections followed the general pattern described earlier, consisting of standard checklist of items, which included physical infrastructure, student attendance and provision of the Midday Meal.

With heightened community vigilance, the Midday Meal program improved significantly in Silam Ghat. Yet parents' aspirations went beyond the provision of school lunches. They wanted, above all else, a high quality education for their children. With only one school teacher in charge of running the school and teaching 40 students across all five grades, parents felt their children were being shortchanged by the government school system. In the words of some parents, what should have been a "school" (*vidyalay*) had become an "eatery" (*bhojanalay*). The Midday Meal program became a symbol for all that was wrong with the education system. While most parents in Silam Ghat approved of the school lunch program, at least in theory, some thought it posed a distraction from teaching.

Fed up with the poor quality of education at the school, parents voiced their concerns to local officials. The women's group organized parents and staged a peaceful demonstration (*dharna*) outside the local education bureaucracy. They demanded additional school teachers and a more effective teaching curriculum. Local officials turned them away, stating that the group had no standing within the state, and that such decisions were made higher up in the bureaucracy. As a stopgap measure, the women's group in Silam Ghat organized funds from families in the village to staff the primary school with an additional teacher. A young high school graduate, the informal teacher had been working on and off at the school for the last five years, with no official training of any kind. She was soon to be married and would leave Silam Ghat to live with her husband and his family, once again reopening the gap. The lack of adequate teaching staff combined with poor quality teaching was high on the minds of parents in Silam Ghat.

Unsatisfied with the makeshift teaching arrangements at the school, the women's association came together to voice their demands once again with the local education bureaucracy. They demanded additional school teachers, particularly those who could teach math and English, subjects that were critical for succeeding in a competitive labor market. The group met with local officials over the course of several months, taking time away from their agricultural work and other responsibilities to visit the administrative block. Yet their demands fell on deaf ears. As the head of the women's group recounted:

We went to the [administrative] block to complain about the lack of teaching going on at the primary school. But not one officer came to help us. Nobody from the Education Department listens

*to what we say. We even had the gram pradhan [village council head] write letters to the administration, but we received no response. The situation became hopeless at the government school so now everyone is looking at private school.*¹⁹⁴

These findings may lead one to suspect that local officials in the education bureaucracy were indifferent towards their work or shirking their duties. However, participant observation and interviews with local officials revealed quite the opposite. Rarely did I find local officials in charge of implementation sitting at their desks. On most days, they were out in the field conducting school inspections and planning for new implementation. Local officials actively surveyed villages that required new infrastructure and other inputs. In the case of Silam Ghat's primary school, local officials initiated the construction of new infrastructure after identifying the need for an upgrade during their routine inspections. Both parents and the school headmaster credited the local bureaucracy for the school's brand new campus.

The bureaucracy was engaged in carrying out the mission to achieve universal primary education, and local officials showed dedication to their work. As they explain during interviews, local officials could not respond to the demand for additional school teachers in Silam Ghat because it would have gone against state policy. As they so often put it, the bureaucracy were simply "*applying the rules*" that covered the allocation of school teachers. As per the Department of Education's teacher rationalization policy, examined in the section prior, schools based in accessible locations could not receive additional teachers. The primary school in Silam Ghat was on the roadside, and the community would have to wait until the needs of other schools were met first, no exceptions. Nor was there any official policy in place for communities to request teachers specializing in math or English. To override local demands was a necessary part of consistent rule enforcement.

Added to this was the worry that community groups like the women's association in Silam Ghat were too enmeshed in local politics. During interviews, local bureaucrats cited various examples of how women's associations engaged in political activities, such as mobilizing votes during village panchayat elections, collecting funds to support a favored candidates, or in one case, laying the groundwork for one of their own leaders to run as a candidate for the state legislature. As some of these officials put it, women's associations and other community groups were subject to "*misuse*" by politicians to obtain votes. For example, these groups would get prodded by local politicians to make demands on the bureaucracy around the time of elections, without any due regard for official policy or the true needs facing their communities. While recognizing the importance of community involvement during school enrolment campaigns and other areas, they believed community groups had to be kept at bay, as their demands were seen as a threat to fair and consistent rule enforcement. To protect bureaucratic decision-making from political interference, local officials had learned to override community demands. And in so doing, they discouraged village collective action around primary schooling, generating poor implementation outcomes.

4.7. Alternative Explanations

¹⁹⁴ Interview with head of women's group, Silam Ghat.

Before concluding the chapter, it is important to reassess the main findings in light of alternative explanations. Apart from bureaucratic norms, there may be other plausible factors that account for the comparatively poor delivery of primary education in Uttarakhand. In addition to conventional variables, such as levels of economic development and caste composition, which we considered at the beginning of the chapter, other plausible alternatives include: (1) civil society and social capital and (2) democracy and political development. In what follows I consider each of these in turn.

4.7.1. Rethinking Civil Society

Recall from the previous chapter that we ended our analysis of implementation in Himachal Pradesh with the question of whether these alternative arguments centered on civil society could better account for the remarkable results observed in that state. Some argue that a culture of civic engagement and vibrant associational life produces superior outcomes for governance (Putnam, Leonardi et al. 1994). Civic associations are thought to provide a form of social capital—norms and networks of trust and reciprocity—that enables citizens to overcome problems of collective action and hold public agencies accountable. A more nuanced approach may go further to examine how the quality and inclusiveness of civic associations shapes governance (Cohen and Rogers 1992; Berman 1997). I suggested that the limitations of these arguments would be made apparent with the comparison between HP and Uttarakhand. The two states share strikingly similar social fabric and history of village collective action. However, as the findings in this chapter demonstrate, local communities in Uttarakhand have not experienced the same kinds of positive returns to local collective action, particularly when directed at the state.

Still, one may be concerned, quite reasonably, that the selection of nested cases within Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand do not adequately capture the variation in civil society across these two states. Might the relative paucity of civic resources explain Uttarakhand's worse performance in implementing primary education? The available evidence strongly suggests not. Neither the somewhat crude method of counting of civic associations, nor a more nuanced assessment of the quality of civic mobilization lend support to the civil society thesis. That is not to say that civic participation does not matter. Rather, as I argue later in the concluding chapter of this dissertation, a careful analysis of *how* public agencies relate to citizens and civic groups, and the conditions under which they mobilize societal resources during policy implementation can help refine our understanding of both the promise and limitations of civil society.

Close observers of Indian civil society have pointed to the importance of India's NGO sector for governance outcomes like (Jenkins 2010). Yet the quality of data on the NGO sector in India is exceedingly poor. Be that as it may, the data that are available on the number of NGOs in Uttarakhand compared to Himachal Pradesh point in favor of the former state. Figures 4.5 in the chapter Appendix shows the raw number of NGOs registered with India's Population Commission in either state. Figure 4.6 adjusts that value for population size. In either case, Uttarakhand has a significantly higher number of NGOs, which would suggest a greater level of civic resources.

Based on these data, one could argue that civil society in either state is weak given the exceedingly low number of NGOs per capita. That assessment would align with the findings of survey research, which finds low levels of reported membership in formal associations, suggesting

that Indian civil society is far too thin to even have a plausible effect on governance (Chhibber 2001; Chhibber, Shastri et al. 2004). It may also be the case, however, that our understanding of civil society, drawn primarily from the experience of Europe and the United States, does not provide an adequate basis for conceptualizing and measuring civil society in developing countries. It may also be the case, however, that survey instruments are too blunt to capture the informal networks and associations that operate in rural India (Krishna 2003). Another set of studies call attention to social movements and other varieties of informal, bottom-up collective mobilization (Heller 1999; Ray and Katzenstein 2005; Agarwala 2013). These suggest the need examine the nature and quality of civil society and its relationship to the state, particularly in the case of marginalized group that may not have access to the same formal associations counted in our standard measures of civil society.

Based on qualitative historical and anthropological research on civic life in Uttarakhand, village communities have long displayed cohesiveness and a capacity for collective action. In a pattern similar to neighboring Himachal Pradesh, the scarcity of agricultural land in the hill region and centrality of natural resources to local livelihood strategies, provided the material basis for social cooperation among village communities. In his classic anthropological study of village life in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand, Berreman's (1972) observed that economic and social life in the hills tended to promote social cooperation. Land ownership and the performance of agricultural labor cut across caste groups, and religious life centered on the worship of a common local deity (*devta*), cohesiveness of village communities. That is not to deny, once againm the presence of caste divisions and socioeconomic inequalities. However, these cleavages have been shown to be far less pronounced compared to other parts of north India, where caste exclusion and economic inequalities are stark.

The prevalence of social norms facilitating collective action in Uttarakhand is most evident from the research on community governance of local forests. Approximately 63 percent of Uttarakhand's land is covered by forest, and hill communities have long relied on forest resources such as fertilizer, fodder and fuel, along with medicinal herbs and fibers (Mehta 2005). Informal institutions to manage forest land and resources operated according to a broadly inclusive consensus-based system (Agrawal 2001). In the early 20th century, formally elected forest councils (*van panchayat*) came to be recognized by the colonial state. British encroachment on forest land for timber along with restrictions imposed on hill residents provoked a flurry of collective resistance and protest across the hill region (Somanathan 1991; Guha 2000). Unable to enforce restrictions upon hill residents or manage their rebellious outbreaks, the colonial government moved to formalize forest councils, granting them official recognition with passage of the Forest Council Rules of 1931.¹⁹⁵ Forest councils continue to play a significant role in governing forest land, albeit with varying levels of effectiveness (Agrawal 1999; Agrawal 2001; Agrawal and Ostrom 2001). As one study finds, close to three thousand formally-elected forest councils are active in just the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand, which translates to roughly a quarter of villages across the region (Agrawal 2001). These official estimates do not capture the informal institutions that continue to operate.

The richness of civic life in Uttarakhand is evidenced further by its more recent spates of social activism. Unlike neighboring Himachal Pradesh, where broad-based social movements did not take hold, Uttarakhand carried forward the legacy of collective resistance well into the post-independence period. The most dramatic display of this was the Chipko Andolan of the 1970s.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ The deliberate setting of forest fires was among the most effective tactics of resistance used by hill residents.

¹⁹⁶ For a historical account of the Chipko Movement, see Guha (2000).

The Chipko Andolan, or “movement,” emerged in response to the state’s attempt to manage forests. The state was seen to favor private contractors and firms exploiting the forests for lumber, to the neglect of local communities. With economic livelihoods at risk due to deforestation, social activists threw themselves in front of the trees that were being axed. Their actions inspired a spate of similar grassroots protests across the state. Clinging firmly to trees as a form of protest gave the movement its name *chipko*, which is the Hindi term for “adhere” or “stick to” (Mawdsley 1998). Importantly, women played a prominent role in the Chipko Movement, demonstrating that civic life was not only the province of men. The felling of trees affected women’s economic lives most directly, as they were primarily responsible for collecting firewood and performing forest-related labor. Apart from Chipko, Uttarakhand has been home to other forms of collective mobilization.¹⁹⁷ The motion for a separate state of Uttarakhand itself drew on popular protest, in contrast to the elite-driven path to statehood in Himachal Pradesh. If anything, the historical and anthropological evidence points in favor of there being a culture of civic engagement in Uttarakhand.

As a final point, if civil society were correct, then the bureaucratic norms documented in this chapter would not be the driving force behind poor service delivery. Rather, society’s poor civic endowments would be driving the inferior implementation outcomes observed. Yet the sequence of causal mechanisms shown in above findings showed that the opposite was true. The gaps in implementation were observed in precisely those steps of the chain in which state action was required, not societal action. In the case of Silam Ghat, collective action by the women’s association preceded the state’s implementation of primary education policy. And it was only after their collective demands were effectively blocked by local officials that parents in Silam Ghat adjusted their expectations and turned away from the primary school system.¹⁹⁸ These findings suggest that social capital does not on its own produce good (or bad) governance, but is mediated by the bureaucratic norms governing public agencies.

5.5. Democracy and Political Development

A second alternative explanation we must factor centers on the role of democracy. A growing body of literature on clientelism in developing democracies contends that party organizations and the political ties between voters and politicians drive governance outcomes (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Stokes, Dunning et al. 2013). Clientelism is thought to work against the implementation of programmatic policies like public education and health by promoting the distribution of particularistic goods in exchange for votes. In the Indian context, political parties are known to compete for particularistic access to state resources, often mobilizing caste and other identities to secure votes (Chhibber 1995; Chandra 2004). Moreover, the extent of clientelism itself may vary across India. As Heller (2000) demonstrates, political parties in Kerala tend to compete on more inclusive policy platforms and make programmatic appeals to voters.

Taking the above literature as a starting point, one may hypothesize that the relatively poor performance of public agencies in Uttarakhand is driven by party politics and the nature of

¹⁹⁷ These include a series of environmental protests against large dam projects, including the relatively recent protests against Tehri Dam.

¹⁹⁸ A similar sequence of events unfolded in the village Pujari, where parents struggled to hold the absentee school teacher to account. In that case as well, parents had organized around education well before the arrival of the state. It was only when collective action was directed at public agencies that difficulties came to surface.

clientelistic ties. Put more forcefully, clientelism may explain not only the poor outcomes for service delivery, but also the behavior of public officials documented above. Bureaucrats subject to particularistic interference from society may face pressure to uphold official rules and procedures while marginalizing the influence of communities and civic agencies. Meanwhile, bureaucrats that attempt to coordinate across the hierarchy and work beyond official rules and procedure may be seen as a potential threat to politicians that want to maintain tight control over state and provide their constituents with particularistic benefits. What I describe as legalistic norms may in turn reflect the bureaucracy's way of handling this highly politicized system of governance.

Compelling as these ideas may be, little empirical evidence has been offered to establish the presence of clientelistic ties, let alone the highly organized vertical networks of votes in exchange for material goods that this literature theorized. To pinpoint the mechanisms by which clientelism shapes bureaucratic behavior would require nothing short of a field-based study of the relations between voters, elected officials and bureaucrats. Pending the availability of that evidence, what we do know about democratic politics in Uttarakhand does not seem to suggest that it can fully account for the poor quality of implementation observed in that state. For one, the party system in Uttarakhand is virtually identical to that of Himachal Pradesh. Both states display high rates of political participation in state elections. In the last state assembly elections, voter turnout was 70 percent for Uttarakhand and 74 percent for Himachal Pradesh. Both states possess what is effectively a two-party system consisting of India's two national parties. Meanwhile, regional parties that make overt caste appeals, such as the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh, have made few political inroads in either state. As discussed earlier in the chapter, voters in Uttarakhand have cited the importance of development and good governance, according to exit poll data taken after state elections.¹⁹⁹

Consider, finally, the evidence on political influence over the bureaucracy. The handful existing studies conducted on linkages between bureaucrats and politicians have focused primarily on the phenomenon of bureaucratic transfers, the process whereby bureaucrats get reassigned to new posts, particularly within the Indian Administrative Service (IAS).²⁰⁰ Yet as Mani and Iyer (2009) show in their careful study of reassignment among IAS officers, the probability of being transferred was not significantly different across these two states. Their observations are further supported by my own findings from the education bureaucracy. Over the course of fieldwork, I found that senior IAS officers occupying the position of Secretary of Education, the highest post in the education bureaucracy, had been reassigned twice in both Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Meanwhile, the second more significant post, State Project Director for SSA, had been reassigned four times in Himachal Pradesh and twice in Uttarakhand. Interview with officials in the SSA State Project Office lamented the instability of leadership in their agency.

There is a clear need for more research on the nature of clientelism in India. Based on the evidence available, we cannot reject the possibility that the political ties between voters and elected officials are different in important ways across Indian states. However, we should also be careful

¹⁹⁹ Preferences around education are also unlikely to vary much between the two states. Both display strong demand for education according to independent household surveys, as well as qualitative evidence based on interviews and focus group discussions with parents (PROBE Team 1999; De, Khera et al. 2011).

²⁰⁰ In one of the few studies on the subject, Iyer and Mani (2009) observe significant political influence over the bureaucracy through the transfer and reassignment of officers. They find that officers that exhibit high ability are no more likely to be rewarded with assignments to prestigious posts than other officers, and that transfers may also lead bureaucrats to invest less in skills, which can undermine the quality of administration.

not to draw inferences about clientelism based on policy implementation outcomes. While much of the clientelism literature draws a sharp distinction between programmatic politics on the one hand and clientelistic politics on the other, there is no reason to assume *a priori* that these are mutually exclusive categories, or opposite ends of the political development spectrum. Elected officials and bureaucrats in both Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand states described their education systems to be rife with patronage, whether in the form of employment for school teachers or contracts for school infrastructure projects. School teachers in both states carry a great deal of political clout, through union organizations as well as informal campaigning. And yet, outcomes for policy implementation vary significantly. Whether and how variation in clientelism can account for disparities in policy implementation demands further investigation.

6. Conclusion

The findings from this chapter demonstrate that bureaucratic norms governing public agencies in Uttarakhand help explain the state's relatively poor performance in educational service delivery. As we saw, Uttarakhand's education system is largely dysfunctional, even though the state began at a higher rate of literacy in comparison to Himachal Pradesh. Notwithstanding high aspirations for an autonomous Uttarakhand, public agencies have yet to fully deliver on the promise of good governance, which their newfound political autonomy from Uttar Pradesh was meant to bring.

A new state and political system characterized by enhanced decentralization and two-party politics does not appear to have altered the norms governing the bureaucracy. An array of field-based evidence points to the persistence of legalism, which continues to guide bureaucrats and structure their relations with citizens and civic agencies outside the state. Officials within Uttarakhand's education bureaucracy adhere strictly to official rules, procedures and policies, while discouraging input from civic actors, which together yields worse outcomes for policy implementation. We analyzed the effects of legalism over the implementation of teacher rationalization and monitoring policies and community governance of primary schooling in Simla and Simal Goan. In both cases, we found that the bureaucracy's legalistic approach produced inferior outcomes.

These findings also provoke us to think more carefully about the role of civil society in governance. Public officials in Uttarakhand effectively block citizens and civic agencies from participating in the implementation process. And these non-state actors have responded by circumventing the state and pursuing alternative means to address their needs, including outright exit from the government school system. To be sure, Uttarakhand remains a fledgling state and it may take time for the bureaucracy to adapt to its new sociopolitical environment. Insofar as norms evolve over stages through repeated interactions, one may have to resist drawing firm conclusions about Uttarakhand's bureaucracy until sufficient time has passed.²⁰¹ That said, one has to wonder whether public agencies in Uttarakhand have the luxury of time under conditions of fast-paced economic growth and rapid privatization of the education sector.

²⁰¹ To that end, Uttarakhand may offer a theoretically rich case of bureaucratic norm evolution and hold promise for future research.

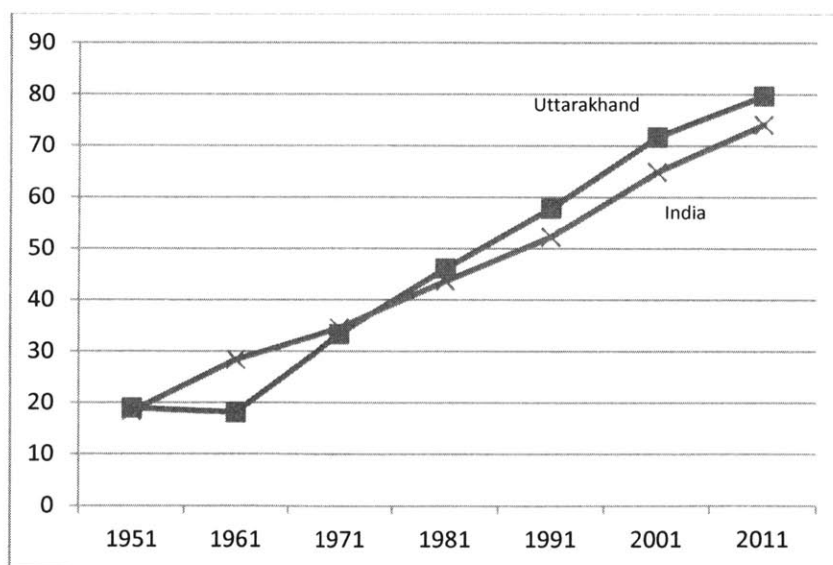
As a final point, the findings presented thus far have analyzed policy implementation within India's Himalayan region. The careful matching and contextualized comparison of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh allowed us to identify the role of bureaucratic norms and the mechanisms through which bureaucratic they operate across these two different states. Owing to the careful comparison, however, our theory has so far been restricted to a region of India that possesses a distinct geography, social composition, and caste and gender norms. One may question whether the theory advanced here can obtain in other places, and what the scope conditions of the mechanisms might be. To further assess when and how bureaucratic norms shape policy implementation, the following chapter takes us down to India's Gangetic plains, in the very different setting of Uttar Pradesh.

Chapter 4 – Appendix

Figure 4.1 Administrative Map of Uttarakhand



Figure 4.2 Literacy Growth in Uttarakhand



Source: Census of India, multiple years.

Table 4.7 Economic and Structural Indicators

	Himachal Pradesh (HP)	Uttarakhand (UK)
<i>Population (million)</i>	6.9	10.1
<i>Sex ratio (females per 1000 males)</i>	974	963
<i>Annual per capita income (Rs.)</i>	50,365	55,877
<i>% Urban</i>	9.8	30.6
<i>% Scheduled Caste</i>	24.7	17.9
<i>% Scheduled Tribe</i>	4.0	3.0

Source: Census of India (2001; 2011).

Annual per capita income: Reserve Bank of India Handbook of Statistics on Indian Economy, 2010-11).

Table 4.8 Infrastructure Development in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh (1991-92)

	Uttar Pradesh	Uttarakhand
Metalled road per 1000 sq. km of area (km)	256	227
No. of schools per 100,000 people		
• Primary	57	144
• Senior basic	11	30
• Higher secondary	5	19
Medical facilities per 100,000 people		
• Allopathic hospitals/dispensaries	3.4	12.4
• Hospital beds	50.3	121.8
• Primary health centers	2.4	3.6
• Sub-centers/maternity service centers	16.0	27.5
Electricity		
• Per capita consumption	170.5	217.10
• % Villages electrified	73.9	73.5

Source: Papola (2000)

Figures 4.5 - 4.6. Registered NGOs in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand

Figure 4.5. Total NGOs

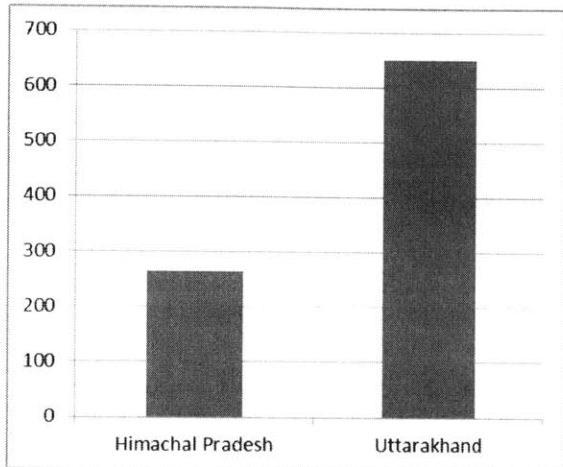
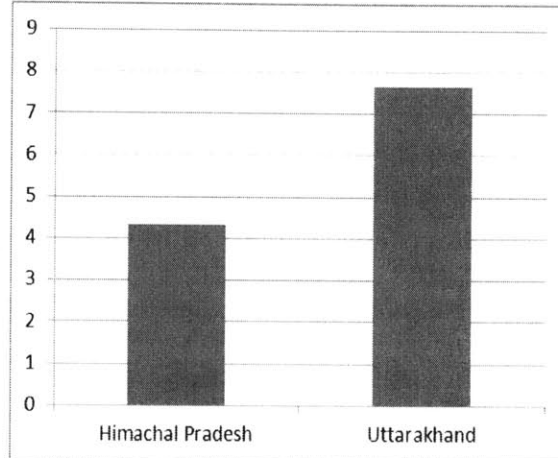


Figure 4.6. NGOs Per 100,000 Population



Source: Population Commission of India (http://ngo.india.gov.in/ngo_stateschemes_ngo.php)
Population in Figure 4.6. based on 2001 Census of India.

Chapter 5. Legalism, Inequality and Educational Miscarriage in Uttar Pradesh

1. Introduction

The previous two chapters analyzed the implementation outcomes for primary education policy in the two hill states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Through a carefully matched comparison I traced the variation in implementation outcomes back to the informal bureaucratic norms that govern public agencies across these two states. However, the analysis thus far has been limited to policy implementation within India's Himalayan region, a region with distinct geographic, socioeconomic and cultural conditions.

This chapter examines the case of Uttar Pradesh (UP), widely regarded as one of India's poorest performing states in the field of primary education. The study of UP allows us to extend the scope conditions of the theory centered on bureaucratic norms by testing whether and how the mechanisms obtain in a very different environment. In sharp contrast to the Himalayan Region, UP is ranked near the bottom among Indian states across virtually every indicator of human well-being. To underscore the range of subnational variation across India, scholars often place Kerala and UP on two opposing ends of the social development spectrum. With social indicators that rival some advanced economies, the southwestern coastal state of Kerala represents the promise of a better quality of life under conditions of relatively low income. UP, meanwhile, whose woeful performance in early child education and health rivals the poorest countries of sub-Saharan Africa, stands out as the dark, cautionary tale of all that can go wrong with India's developing democracy.

A theoretically least-likely setting, a study of policy implementation in UP is compelling for a few reasons. First, a variety of explanations have been put forward for UP's poor performance in social development—crippling poverty, a history of social divisions and inequality, and divisive caste politics, just to name a few. Yet many of these conditions are observable in other Indian states as well, many of which have outperformed UP in primary education. Second, these explanations face a difficult time accounting for the *changes* one can observe within UP. Against an overall bleak picture, UP has made noteworthy gains in primary education over the last decade, with a significant expansion in provision of school infrastructure, student enrollment and access to schooling.

The central objective of this chapter is to explain the puzzle of how UP has managed to achieve notable gains in school infrastructure, while continuing to perform poorly on other crucial dimensions of policy implementation. It also seeks test the mechanisms through which legalism shapes policy implementation under conditions of entrenched social hierarchy and caste politics, a sociopolitical context that would seem to militate against rule-following.

The rest of this chapter is organized as follows. Section 5.2 discusses UP's educational performance. Against a dismal picture overall, the state has made significant gains in school infrastructure and enrollment. Section 5.3 anchors the analysis of policy implementation within the sociopolitical context of UP, one marked by deeply entrenched social divisions and inequalities and a political system that promotes particularism and caste politics. I then motivate the argument in Section 5.4 with vignette illustrating the mechanisms through which legalistic norms are hypothesized to produce outcomes for policy implementation. Sections 5.5 and 5.6 present the main empirical findings. Section 5.5 establishes the presence of legalism within UP's education bureaucracy, drawing on interviews and participant observation conducted with public officials at various levels of the administrative hierarchy, as well as with civic agencies outside the state.

I present a series of nested case studies in Section 5.6, testing the mechanism through which legalistic norms produce implementation outcomes in UP across the tasks of infrastructure planning and development and the delivery of the Midday Meal Program. I analyze these mechanisms at the state and local district level against alternative hypotheses that center on particularism and bureaucratic capture. Finally, I bring the analysis down to the village level to determine whether and how legalism produces school dysfunction in the village Pundail, comparing the mechanisms of the theory against alternative hypothesis centered on UP's social divisions and public apathy. Section 5.7 reexamines the findings in light of alternative explanations.

The findings from UP's education bureaucracy leave open the question of whether public agencies governed by a different set of norms could produce better results for educational service delivery in UP. I explore that question in Section 5.8, which analyzes the implementation of a residential school program for disadvantaged girls by Mahila Samakhya, a quasi-public agency for women's empowerment instituted in select states across India by the central government. I connect the outcomes of Mahila Samakhya's school program to deliberative norms governing the behavior of officials within the agency and its relationship to marginalized communities. The analysis suggests the possibility and limits of this alternative model in the challenging sociopolitical environment of rural Uttar Pradesh. Section 5.9 concludes with a summary of chapter's contributions.

5.2. The Educational Scenario in Uttar Pradesh

Uttar Pradesh (pop. 200 million) is widely regarded as one of India's great laggards in terms of social development. It consistently ranks near the bottom among Indian states on outcomes for primary education. In the area of child health and nutrition, it performs worse than some of the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The World Bank's *2004 World Development Report* paints a grim picture of India's most populous state, comparing UP's appalling performance on virtually every other indicator of human well-being against Kerala's remarkable triumphs. The failures of governance in UP have weighed heavily on India's overall progress.

To be sure, the initial conditions in UP were not the most favorable. Administering such a large and diverse state was never easy, and regional disparities in social and economic development are striking.²⁰² The significant variation across these regions notwithstanding, it is widely believed that poor governance exacerbated regional inequalities, so much so that there have been repeated proposals to divide Uttar Pradesh into four separate states (see Figure 5.1 in chapter Appendix).²⁰³ The separation of the hill state of Uttarakhand, which we examined in the previous chapter, grew out of local alienation with the governance process under UP (Kumar 2000).

²⁰² UP can broadly be divided into four regions based on their distinct cultural-linguistic and geographic characteristics: western (Paschimanchal), central (Awadh), eastern (Purvanchal) and southern (Bundelkhand)

²⁰³ The most recent of these was made by Mayawati's BSP government in November, 2011: "Mayawati cabinet proposes division of Uttar Pradesh into four states," *Times of India*, November 15, 2011, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-11-15/india/30401294_1_mayawati-poorvanchal-upa-government.

UP's dismal social progress has placed it prominently among Indian states in the BIMARU region.²⁰⁴ Around the time of independence, close to 90 percent of the population was illiterate (see Figure 5.2 in chapter Appendix). Yet many states, including Himachal Pradesh, faced similar or worse conditions and still managed to make significant social progress. For the majority of India's post-independence history, the literacy gap between UP and other states would only widen. While the educational scenario in UP remained appalling at an absolute level, it grew increasingly *worse* in comparison to the rest of India. By the year 2000, a time when school enrollment rates in Kerala had already crossed the 90 percent mark, close to a third of rural girls (age 10-12) in UP had never even set foot in a school (World Bank 2003: 44).

Based on the past, one may think that there is no hope for UP. However, recent developments within the state paint a picture that is far more complex. For one, UP has been catching up quickly with other states in terms of literacy, and is now less than five points below the national average. According to India's most recent census, UP overtook the state of Rajasthan, albeit by a small margin, in just the last decade. That is a significant achievement. Rajasthan's progress in poverty reduction, improved literacy and other areas of social development has gained scholarly attention, prompting some to call for its removal from the 'BIMARU' category of Indian states (Sinha 2005; Debroy and Bhandari 2007). The fact that Rajasthan, which appeared to observers to have a clear lead over other Hindi belt states well into the future, was overtaken by Uttar Pradesh within such a short period of time, casts doubt on our understanding of social development. It offers a sobering reminder of not only the possibilities, but also the precariousness of developmental gains, and compels closer study of the mechanisms through which such gains are (not) sustained over time.

5.2.1. School Access and Infrastructure

Embracing the full complexity of UP's current education scenario, I examine a comprehensive set of indicators for the implementation of universal primary education policy. While major gaps remain, close observers agree that UP has made significant progress in terms of school infrastructure and access over the last decade. With the introduction of SSA policies by India's central government, the state opened 19,179 new primary schools and 28,034 new middle schools between the years 2002-2011, which corresponds to a growth rate of more than 45 percent within a decade (NUEPA 2012).²⁰⁵

Perhaps more impressive than the sheer magnitude of UP's school expansion is the provision of infrastructure and facilities within each school. Table 5.1 summarizes the data from Pratham's ASER Report on the presence of school facilities and physical inputs in government primary schools in rural UP. Data for the other two states included in this study are provided for comparison. The facilities listed in the table, such as classrooms and school boundary walls, are provided by SSA, the central government's flagship education program. The provision of these

²⁰⁴ BIMARU is a popular Hindi acronym standing for the (literally "sick") socioeconomically backward states —Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh—that are located in the northern Hindi belt region of the country.

²⁰⁵ These achievements have also been recognized by India's central government, which has sanctioned the release of funds for the UP government to open an additional 10,000 new primary (and middle) schools: "New Schools Approved for UP," *The Hindu*, <http://www.thehindu.com/education/article2500828.ece>.

facilities is deemed mandatory under India's recently passed Right to Education Act. As the data indicate, primary schools in UP tend to have the required school facilities. With the exception of school boundary walls, Uttar Pradesh performs significantly better than average, and interestingly, even better than the educationally advanced state of Himachal Pradesh.

These school infrastructure statistics are further supported by qualitative studies of schooling in UP. During my own visits to more than 50 primary schools across the state, I found most schools equipped with three or more classrooms, kitchen sheds, water pumps, and other facilities, even in the most economically deprived regions of the state. An official from Pratham's head office in Lucknow similarly noted, *"Actually, if you observe the schools in UP you find that they generally good buildings that are well-painted. Compare this to Andhra Pradesh, where we have also done work. There you won't find such good infrastructure and well-painted buildings."* That is not to say the school infrastructure in UP is not lacking in many respects. For one, how sustainability of much of this newly built infrastructure is open to question given the inadequate maintenance of school buildings.

Table 5.1 School Facilities and Physical Inputs
(% of schools that have the following)

State	At least one classroom per teacher	Office / Storage space	Boundary Wall	Drinking water facility	Toilets	Kitchen shed
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	76.7	75.5	37.3	87.5	89.2	82.0
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	81.6	87.9	67.0	77.9	94.2	96.3
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	87.4	88.6	44.4	93.1	93.3	89.3
All India	75.6	74.5	52.2	82.6	89.9	81.3

Source: ASER Report (2011).

With these infrastructure investments, UP has improved access across the state, raising student enrollments significantly. The most recent data available from Pratham's ASER survey, which is carried out annually across rural India, found that only 6.1 percent of children in the age group 6-14 were not enrolled in school during the 2011 academic year (ASER 2012). The gains in school enrollment over the last decade are notable. Yet growing enrollment masks persistent problems of student attendance and retention. Vulnerable groups in particular, such as rural adolescent girls, continue to remain outside the school system. According to the ASER data, the proportion of rural girls of age 11-14 years who were out of school in UP declined only slightly from 11.1 percent in 2006 to 9.7 percent in 2011.

The gains in school enrollment, while noteworthy, mask ongoing problems with student attendance. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS), one of India's most comprehensive and reliable household surveys found that 77.2 percent of children ages 6-14 were attending school during the 2005-06 academic year, slightly below the national average of 79.6 percent (NFHS-3 2007). The discrepancy between student enrollment and attendance data reflects the fact that a significant proportion of students that have formally signed up for school, often through enrollment drives and other campaigns, do not attend on a regular basis. Even the NFHS attendance data are

likely to mask the true attendance rates, as they do not decipher between students who go to school occasionally and those who attend on a more regular basis. Factoring in the irregularity of attendance could significantly raise the percentage of students effectively not receiving an education.

5.2.2. Service Delivery

The infrastructure and enrollment gains in UP, significant as they are, do not in any way detract from the appalling quality of service delivery across the state. Take first the Indian government's Midday Meal program, a major policy for improving child nutrition and school attendance. According to the latest ASER Report, close to 30 percent of schools in UP were not serving the meal on the day of the survey visit (see Table 5.2). These numbers fail to capture the exceptionally poor conditions of the school lunch program in UP. Apart from not providing meals on a daily basis, both official and media accounts find the meals lacking the minimally required amount of nutrition, a lack of menu options and poor quality food. According to officials overseeing the program in UP, cases of children falling ill due to food spoilage happens with regularity.²⁰⁶

Table 5.2 Provision of Midday Meal

	Midday Meal Served on day of school visit (%)
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	98.0
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	95.1
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	71.2
All India	83.4

Source: ASER Report (2011).

More than even the Midday Meal program, the condition of educational service delivery in UP is dire. The rate of teacher absence in UP is only marginally above average, and the percentage of single teacher schools is below average for India (see Tables 5.3-5.5). Yet these data mask the dismal state of affairs inside UP's primary schools. For one, given UP's relatively high fertility rate, primary schools have to cater to a much larger child population than in most other states. According to the latest ASER Report, nearly 95 percent of primary schools (Grades 1-5) surveyed in UP have more than 60 students, and almost half have more than 150 students. Meanwhile, the same survey found that in 70 percent of the schools, three teachers or less is the norm. Under these conditions, even the occasional absence of a teacher can greatly impact student achievement. In addition, even when teachers are present, the inadequate provision of basic academic resources within each school makes the possibility of learning further distant. Less than half of UP's primary

²⁰⁶ "IIM-Lucknow study points to poor nutrition levels of mid-day meals," *Indian Express*, Sunday, November 30, 2008, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/iimlucknow-study-points-to-poor-nutrition-levels-of-midday-meals/392396/0>.

schools are equipped with library books (see Table 5.5). More than a quarter of them do not even have the essential teaching-learning materials provided under the SSA program.

Table 5.3 Teacher Absence Rate

State	Teacher Absence (%)
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	21.2
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	32.8
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	26.3
Weighted Average	24.8

Source: Kremer et al. (2005)

Table 5.4 Single-Teacher Primary Schools

	% Primary schools	% Students enrolled
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	7.9	4.6
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	19.5	10.6
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	3.0	2.3
<i>All India</i>	11.8	6.1

Source: DISE (2012).

Table 5.5 Library and Teaching-Learning Materials

	Library Books Available (% schools)	Teaching-Learning Materials Available
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	80.3	91.5
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	48.6	82.4
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	47.7	73.5
<i>All India</i>	63.1	80.4

Source: ASER Report (2011).

The absence of teaching activity taking place in UP's government school system has been well-documented in qualitative studies as well (PROBE Team 1999; De, Khara et al. 2011). To find teachers arriving late, sitting idle at their desks all day long, and sometimes even showing up to class drunk is not out of the ordinary. The consequences for student learning are quite clear. According

to official data, nearly one out of six children in UP drop out of the primary school system by fifth grade (see Table 5.6), in many cases because they lack any meaningful skills and/or lose interest in continuing with school. The latest ASER Report reveals an alarming picture of student learning in UP. More than half of rural fifth graders surveyed in the state cannot read from a second grade textbook or do basic arithmetic involving two-digit subtraction (ASER 2012). Successive ASER surveys administered over the last few years document a *decline* in learning outcomes in government primary schools. It is perhaps no surprise then that the rate of privatization in UP is quite high given its level of income and in comparison to other Indian states (Kingdon 2007; ASER 2012).

Table 5.6 Student Dropout Rate
(% students in grades 1-5)

	Boys	Girls	All
<i>Himachal Pradesh</i>	2.6	2.7	2.6
<i>Uttarakhand</i>	7.4	6.3	6.9
<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	17.4	15.0	16.2
All India	10.15	9.75	9.95

Source: Mehta (2011)

5.3. Social Inequality and Caste Politics

The educational conditions in UP examined above are complex. While the expansion of physical infrastructure and improved access to schooling has been significant, the quality of service delivery in UP's primary schools is abysmal, and stubborn inequalities across region and social groups continue to pose a serious challenge for achieving universal primary education. How can we make sense of these poor, though somewhat mixed, outcomes? In what follows, I offer an explanation that centers on the presence of norms within the education bureaucracy. Before moving ahead, however, it helps to ground the findings within the social and political conditions facing UP, the environment in which the education bureaucracy operates. Public agencies do not operate in a sociopolitical vacuum, particularly those in charge of delivering public services like education.

5.3.1 Social Inequality

In contrast to the Himalayan region, Uttar Pradesh is a far more unequal and divided society. Sociologists have written extensively about the oppressive nature of caste hierarchy in UP. Though it is common to make broad-based differences between upper castes and lower castes, the nature of caste divisions in UP is far more subtle. Forms of caste exclusion and untouchability continue to pervade UP society. Here I will just touch upon the domain of education. Few educational opportunities were traditionally available to lower caste groups, particularly Dalits, who were barred altogether from attending school. Studies document the indignities experienced by Dalit children at the hands of upper caste communities, including school teachers (Govinda and Diwan 2002). A similar set of observations has been made regarding the unequal and highly restrictive gender norms

in UP, which prioritize the male child and limit the physical movement, education and economic opportunities available to girls (Drèze and Sen 2002).

Beyond outright discrimination, caste divisions and inequalities in UP are thought to undermine social cooperation more broadly, leading to public apathy and neglect around services like primary education. The “public apathy” thesis has prominent followers, including Drèze and Sen (2002), who argue that traditional divisions in UP impede collective action around basic services like education and health. So tight is the grip of social divisions in rural UP, they argue, that it is not uncommon to find schools closed for days on end, and teachers persistently absent or even showing up to class drunk, with little collective protest from the public.²⁰⁷ By contrast, primary schools in the state of Kerala are thought to function much better due to greater collective vigilance by local communities, whose efforts go above and beyond state initiatives. Along the same lines, the World Bank’s 2004 *World Development Report* attributes the dysfunctional conditions within UP’s primary schools and public health centers largely to collective neglect at the community level (World Bank 2003).

The above research offers important insights on the relationship between social inequality and collective action. Missing from the analysis, however, is an account of how public agencies bear on social relations when implementing policies on the ground. What are the ways in which public officials transact and negotiate in a highly divided and unequal society when carrying out policy implementation? One often reads that state-society relations in UP are in effect clientelistic exchanges, either of the monetary or identity-based variety.²⁰⁸ That is, they are relations of corruption for those who can pay, and (often caste-based) particularism for those who have a “known and recognized” (*jan pahchan*) official within the state (Jeffrey and Lerche 2000: 866). Although I was alerted to both types of exchanges over the course of fieldwork, these two forms of exchange do not exhaust the range of interactions between public officials and citizens. Nor do they apply across many of the tasks required for implementing universal primary education. Moreover, this literature leaves open a critical question: what of those who have neither the economic resources nor *jan pahchan* within the state? The reality facing most Dalits and other marginalized groups is precisely that, one of economic and social exclusion. How do public agencies (not) work on *their* behalf?

5.3.2. Caste Politics

The rise of lower caste politics over the last few decades has fundamentally altered the shape of democracy in Uttar Pradesh. Regional political parties targeting lower caste voters have gained ascendance and compete vociferously for political control over the state. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), with its loyal Dalit vote bank, caused ripples through the UP political system in 2007 when it achieved the first state majority government in 26 years. The BSP head, Mayawati, made political history in 1996 after becoming the first Dalit (and female) Chief Minister of UP. She again made history again in 2007 after leading her party to win a major victory in UP state elections, forming the

²⁰⁷ Cases of non-functioning schools abound in UP. For example, in their longitudinal study of Palanpur Village, Dreze and Gazdar (1996) persistent teacher absenteeism rendered the local primary school non-functional for ten years.

²⁰⁸ On the relationship between caste, clientelism and corruption in Uttar Pradesh see Jeffrey and Lerche (2000), Jeffrey (2002), and Dutta (2012).

first majority government in 26 years. Notwithstanding these remarkable political achievements, the BSP's commitment to improving the quality of life for Dalits has been called into question (Pai 2002). The same goes for its rival, the Samajwadi Party (SP), which has a strong following among OBCs, particularly the *Yadav* community. Mostly recently, SP continued the trend towards regional party domination in UP when it won a majority government in 2012.

Though the political mobilization of lower castes in UP is an accomplishment in its own right, the extent to which it has improved their socioeconomic status is an open question. One might have expected the quality of governance for the disadvantaged to improve in such a highly competitive political landscape, especially in policy areas like primary education, which would benefit economically deprived, lower caste voters. Yet neither the BSP nor the SP has offered much in the way of a programmatic policy agenda. Instead, these parties are known to advertise the caste identities of their candidates around election time (Chandra 2004). The policies they do advance come in the form of narrow, targeted benefits such as extending caste-based reservations, a form of affirmative action in employment and education. Within the domain of development, the BSP's most visible policy initiative has been the Ambedkar Village Scheme, which (claims to) target villages having a high concentration of Dalits with new roads, sewage lines, electrification, and other infrastructure projects.²⁰⁹ Some criticize the program for dividing the poor along caste (and religious) lines.²¹⁰

If not development, these parties have advanced a politics of dignity. The BSP in particular engaged in a highly visible cultural project, constructing parks and memorials for Dalit leaders across the state. The party has erected thousands of statues across UP commemorating Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Dalit national icon and architect of India's Constitution, along with other Dalit leaders, including Mayawati herself. With no development agenda to speak of, not even a party manifesto, some doubt the motives behind the BSP's political rise, as the party appears to be working not for the socioeconomic upliftment of Dalits, but instead for control over public resources (Pai 2002; Chandra 2004).²¹¹ These scholars find little support for mass education among regional party leadership, contrasting their political projects in UP with the lower caste movements in south India, which tied Dalit social upliftment to the spread of literacy (Mehrotra 2006). Some go so far as to say that lower caste political mobilization within UP has only strengthened social cleavages, reinforced clientelism and undermined any sense of the common good (Chandra 2004). Whatever one may think about the BSP policy agenda, as the first Dalit (and female) Chief Minister of UP, Mayawati's achievements in politically mobilizing one of India's most downtrodden populations in a caste-ridden society like UP are nothing short of extraordinary.

²⁰⁹ I say "claims to" because it is unclear who in fact actually receives these infrastructure projects. According to the official list of Ambedkar Villages that I obtained during fieldwork in District Saharanpur, which is where Mayawati's own constituency is based, the villages had mostly *non*-Dalit populations.

²¹⁰ Critics argue that the Ambedkar Village Scheme has generated ill will between Hindu Dalits and other economic downtrodden groups, particularly poor OBCs and Muslims, who may have even greater need for governmental support. See, for example, "Progress in a Dalit Village Creates Ill-will in Muslims Nearby," India Real Time, *The Wall Street Journal*, <http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2012/03/02/progress-in-a-dalit-village-creates-ill-will-in-muslims-nearby>.

²¹¹ As Pai (2002) observes, the BSP operates according to a theory of change "from above," that is, to gain political power and rework the bureaucracy in favor of Dalits and other disadvantaged groups. In that sense, it is fundamentally a "statist" party, one whose agenda for social justice does not amount to a rejection of the state, but instead involves control over the state apparatus. How far the BSP has succeeded towards that goal is an open question.

The rise of caste politics in UP is thought to undermine the operation of the bureaucracy (Jeffrey, Jeffery et al. 2008). Targeted policies like the Ambedkar Village Scheme are understood to reinforce particularism within the state and obstruct the delivery of universal public goods like education and health (Keefer and Khemani 2004). These studies make critical observations about the influence of caste politics over the state. Yet they tend to paint the bureaucracy as a victim, captured by corrupt principals. They raise the question of how bureaucratic norms operate under conditions of caste politics and clientelistic interference. How do public officials negotiate these political conditions as they carry out various their responsibilities? As I will aim to show in the empirical case studies, even particularistic policies like the Ambedkar Village Scheme can be reformulated on the ground according to bureaucratic norms.

5.4. Mechanisms Illustrated

Having taken account of the educational conditions in UP as well as the sociopolitical context facing the bureaucracy, I now turn to the explanation put forward in this chapter. Using a combination of field methods, including in-depth interviews, participant observation and village ethnography, I find that legalistic norms governing public agencies in UP lead to very poor delivery of educational services, while at the same time enabling school infrastructure development to a large degree. Legalistic norms lead bureaucrats to interpret rules and procedures strictly, apply policies uniformly across cases, and effectively marginalize citizens and civic actors in the implementation process. Public officials engage in these behaviors to carry out the mission of universal primary education while protecting the state from societal interference. In so doing, however, they undermine service delivery and reproduce social inequalities on the ground. To motivate the analysis, I begin with a short vignette, taken from urban UP, which illustrates how infrastructure provision, a task that may appear “easy,” can pose serious challenges for the state. I then turn to a preview of the mechanisms in my argument, the pathways through which legalistic norms operate and yield the poor (albeit mixed) outcomes for implementation in Uttar Pradesh.

5.4.1. *Motivating Vignette: No School for Azam Nagar*

On a warm afternoon, I made my way through the narrow gullies of Azam Nagar, a slum located in Agra. A city of great historical and cultural import—Agra once served as capital of the Mughal Empire and was later a significant base of government for the British—it is possibly the most prominent tourist destination in Uttar Pradesh, if not all of India. Among other attractions, it is home to the Taj Mahal, the country’s preeminent architectural wonder. Yet even the impressive tourist sites of Agra could not conceal a town crumbling from decades of urban decay. In many ways, the conditions inside Azam Nagar were emblematic of Agra’s broader public neglect. An illegal settlement, Azam Nagar consisted of 2,500 houses sprawled across ten small habitations (*bastis*). Walking along windy footpaths marked with potholes and cow manure, I tread with caution, skipping over open sewage lines and dodging live electrical wires hanging from rickety poles. Pratham, a renowned education NGO, had been working in Azam Nagar for several years and ran a library program for children.

Residents of Azam Nagar recounted their experience migrating there from villages around Agra and the bordering state of Rajasthan. Most men worked as rikshaw pullers, and in many cases, their children also worked for supplementary income. A conservative Muslim community, many families were wary about educating their daughters outside the neighborhood, especially upon reaching adolescence. The nearest government primary school was a long distance away, and few could afford the monthly fees at nearby private schools. Pratham fieldworkers, with support from influential community members, mobilized families to educate their children and press public agencies to build a new school within the slum. Over the course of three years, residents of Azam Nagar came together and wrote letters to various concerned departments, made frequent visits to the education bureaucracy, and even contacted their local MLA (state legislator), who responded affirming that he would take the necessary steps to help them. Notwithstanding their collective efforts, no school had been built.

I inquired further about the case at the office for the Department of Education. There I was cordially greeted by Mr. Mian, a local official who had been in contact with Pratham fieldworkers and community members in Azam Nagar. When I asked about the proposal to build a new school, he recounted his frustrations: *"We have tried repeatedly, but nothing can be done. We have to work according to the guidelines given to us by the Basic Shiksha Adhikari [District Education Officer]. We can't change any of the rules on their [the community's] behalf."* He was referring to rules regarding construction on illegal settlements. While Mr. Mian was able to obtain clearance and funds for the school building by the Department of Education, to actually build the school, he would have to coordinate with multiple agencies to gain the requisite approvals. *"I tried approaching my seniors about this, but I got little response in return. After much complaining by me, they forwarded the proposal higher up. But nothing has come of it. Instead, we are told to focus on our routine work."*

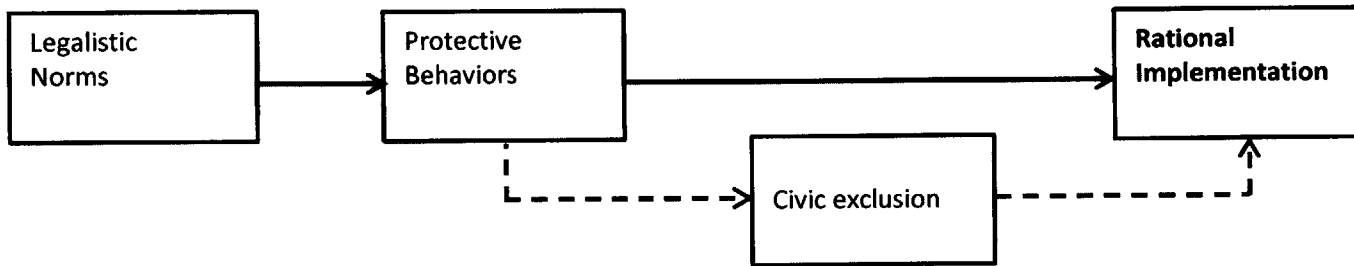
The example of Azam Nagar presents a puzzle. One might suppose, on the one hand, that public agencies in Agra were neglecting the town's poor, minority Muslim population, a charge often leveled against the Indian state. Yet there was no lack of public support for the new school. In UP's fiercely competitive local elections, a community of more than 2,500 households could not be brushed aside so easily. Nor was there a dearth of public resources; funding for the school building had been released, but was sitting idle. Perhaps this was a case of bureaucrats shirking their official duties. According to my interviews with Pratham's fieldworkers, individuals within the local bureaucracy supported their efforts to enroll out of school children across Agra on several occasions. It was not for a lack of will or resources that no school had been built in Azam Nagar. The reality, as Mr. Mian put it, was that *"Even if we want to do something here, we can't do it."*

5.4.2. Mechanisms

The above is a small example of how legalism influences the functioning of public agencies in UP. Recall from the theory developed in Chapter 1 that legalism promotes rule-following behavior (see Figure 5.3). Bureaucrats subject to legalistic norms interpret rules, roles and procedures strictly. They tend to apply policies uniformly across cases without making exceptions for particular individuals or groups, and try to work within the lines of their official mandate. Legalistic norms lead bureaucrats to resist the input of civic actors, whose influence can affect the internal affairs of the state. In areas where civic participation is prescribed by policy, bureaucrats choose to work through official-recognized agencies and channels, excluding unrecognized

associations. Taken together, these bureaucratic behaviors produce a rational implementation process, one that aims to preserve the integrity of the state while limiting the scope for societal interference. As a consequence, however, legalism tends to favor privileged citizens, who enjoy multiple levers of access to the state, while further marginalizing the disadvantaged.

Figure 5.3 Theoretical Process



The process I describe above is entirely theoretical, but consider how it helps illuminate the case of Azam Nagar. Building a school in Azam Nagar epitomizes the challenge public agencies face in meeting the needs of communities living in informal settlements. For agencies governed by legalistic norms, however, the problem takes on a whole new form. Officials tend to work within their official mandates and interpret policies in a strict and uniform manner across cases, making no exceptions for particular individuals or groups. To commence construction for a school within the slum area, the Agra Nagar Nigam (Municipal Corporation) would first have to approve the use of land. Environmental and safety clearances would also have to be obtained. Coordinating these activities for a new school in Azam Nagar did not fall within the mandate of the education bureaucracy, and Mr. Mian's seniors made that clear to him. In his repeated requests to Agra's Basic Shiksha Adhikari (District Education Officer) for permission to build a school in the illegal slum, Mr. Mian exposed himself as someone who interpreted the rules too liberally:

The more I push to do something different, the more I'm viewed with suspicion. My office will begin to question me, that, 'What is his motive behind asking again and again for a special concession? They would think that 'He must be gaining some personal benefit (phaida) from the deal.

To coordinate with other municipal agencies to obtain the necessary permits within an illegal settlement was to work outside the rules and make an exception for a particular community. Yet Mr. Mian was doing precisely that: interpreting the rules loosely to accommodate local needs. That he was closely involved with Pratham, and appeared to be trying hard to build the new school in Azam Nagar, raised suspicion among his colleagues. What *phaida* was in it for him? Was he trying to benefit monetarily from the transaction? Those were the questions looming in his office, and so he felt compelled to back down. In UP, cases like Mr. Mian's abound. Public officials who attempt to work beyond the rules and interpret policies in a flexible manner raise suspicion and are quelled, while those who adhere firmly to procedure are seen favorably. In what follows, I attempt to demonstrate how this normative mechanism operates across a range of cases and situations.

To understand how legalistic norms connect to the implementation outcomes observed in Uttar Pradesh, it helps to break apart first the various activities underlying the delivery universal primary education. Table 5.4 summarizes some of the main administrative tasks required for implementing universal primary education policies. A brief description of the associated bureaucratic behaviors prescribed by legalistic norms is provided side-by-side.²¹² These tasks can be divided into three broad categories of activities: (1) school planning and provision, (2) delivery of educational services, and (3) system monitoring and feedback. While the first category involves activities related to *quantitative* improvements, like the development of physical infrastructure and school facilities, the latter two sets of activities are more closely tied to the *quality* of service delivery. System monitoring and local feedback is particularly relevant to education quality, since the daily functioning of primary schools is largely out of the hands of state planners in Lucknow, and even local bureaucrats stationed in a district office.

Figure 5.4 Policy Implementation: Tasks and Behaviors

Administrative Tasks	Bureaucratic Behaviors
<i>School planning and provision</i>	
School infrastructure development	-Conduct planning process within dedicated agency and restrict outside input or interference
Regional planning and policy targeting	-Apply policies uniformly across different regions and social groups
<i>Educational service delivery</i>	
Teacher posting	-Apply uniform, rational procedure for allocation of teachers across schools
Academic support	-Provide academic resources in uniform, top-down process
Community support	-Work with officially-recognized school agencies within the areas mandated by policy
<i>Monitoring and feedback</i>	
System monitoring	-Follow top-down school inspection model and identify gaps through official surveys
Local feedback	-Incorporate local feedback through official channels

As a preview to the detailed case studies presented in the following section, let us consider briefly here a few examples of how legalistic norms shape bureaucratic behavior around these activities. Take first the task of infrastructure planning and development. India's SSA program aims to achieve universal access to primary schooling in large part through the construction of new schools. Public agencies have, in theory, a diversity of methods at their disposal for carrying out that

²¹² As I discussed in Chapter 1, the list of tasks was compiled after conducting extensive interviews with public officials, nongovernmental agencies, education experts and school teachers across north India.

task. They could, for instance, call on elected officials to identify villages in their constituencies that require school buildings, or at a more local level, encourage gram panchayats (elected village councils) to come forward with proposals for new school within their areas. They could tie up with local community groups to determine which buildings require remodeling and additional facilities such as school classrooms and kitchen sheds for cooking the Midday Meal. Faced with these options, the education bureaucracy in UP will tend to confine infrastructure planning and development within the dedicated sub-division of the education bureaucracy, in this case the Civil Works wing of the SSA State Project Office.

In carrying out their responsibilities, bureaucrats would follow official mandates for new school construction closely, overriding local demands and interference. For instance, when deciding where to construct a school building, they would interpret rules narrowly, like those regarding school distance, which require that primary schools must be built within one kilometer of a habitation, whether the local community expresses a need for it or not. By overriding local needs, bureaucrats attempt to steer clear of local politics and ensure that the policies under SSA are administered by the book. The outcome, one should expect, is primary schools built uniformly across all communities, according to official standards and with all facilities deemed mandatory

Consider now educational service delivery. Across these tasks, bureaucrats face significant variability in terms of the particular needs and context facing local communities, schools and school teachers. They cannot, however, show favor to any particular case. Instead, they will tend to apply a uniform policy across cases, for instance, the official requirement for no single-teacher schools. Anything beyond that, such as addressing the needs of school teachers, providing academic support to schools and engaging in community outreach will tend to be applied uniformly and not according to the needs of each case. As a result, the outcomes in individual cases will tend to vary significantly depending on factors external to the bureaucracy, including geography and community relations. In a socially divided and unequal society like rural UP, the process will tend to favor groups that dominate, including upper castes and school teachers, while disempowering marginalized citizens. As a consequence, we can expect service delivery to work against the needs of lower caste communities, generating worse classroom experiences for students, and encouraging dropouts.

Finally, the activities around monitoring and feedback aim to ensure that the education system is functioning well. Public agencies operating according to legalistic norms will tend to apply a standard, top-down model of inspections and rely on official surveys to identify out-of-school children and gaps in service delivery. Meanwhile, the same norms compel bureaucrats to downplay and disregard feedback from outside agencies, including local NGOs and informal community groups that have no official standing. As a consequence, the process of verification and redress will again favor more privileged actors, who have greater capacity and political wherewithal to defend themselves, and in some cases, even manipulate the rules in their favor. As a result, we can expect local conflicts over teacher absence, problems with the Midday Meal, and so on to work against marginalized groups.

5.5. Legalism in Uttar Pradesh

Having offered a preview of the mechanisms by which legalistic norms in the bureaucracy lead to the implementation outcomes observed in Uttar Pradesh, this section turns now to the main

empirical findings of the chapter. I begin by establishing the presence of legalism within the state, drawing on examples taken from different divisions and levels of the education bureaucracy as well as the experiences of civic actors involved in education. The section then turns to a series of case studies that demonstrate how legalistic norms lead to implementation outcomes across the different tasks associated with primary education policy. These cases are drawn from fieldwork conducted at the state, district and village-level. They offer fine-grained evidence for how legalistic norms shape bureaucratic behavior across a variety of contexts, how civic actors respond to these behaviors, and how the combination of bureaucratic and civic action lead to observed outcomes for primary education in rural Uttarakhand.

5.5.1. The Legalistic Bureaucracy

The bureaucracy in Uttar Pradesh presents a conundrum. On the one hand, UP has one of the most venerable bureaucratic legacies in the country. Under British rule, UP was often considered the best-administered province in India. In the decades following Independence, a bureaucratic posting in UP was among the most highly-coveted positions within the Indian state. The high status accorded to UP's bureaucracy was tied in many ways to the state's significance for national politics. Since Jawaharlal Nehru onwards, eight of India's fourteen prime ministers came from UP. The prestige associated with working in UP attracted exceptionally skilled public servants, as reflected in earlier studies of the Indian state.²¹³ With his penchant for centralized planning, Nehru was considered an architect of India's secular, modern state and UP's bureaucracy the exemplar of his vision (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987; Frankel 2005).

The National Academy of Administration was established in the town of Mussoorie in 1959, a remote Himalayan hill station that belonged to UP until the hill region separated in 2000 to form the state of Uttarakhand. The Academy was the primary training site for each new batch of IAS officers, an experience that would leave them with a shared professional identity as members of "the service." The exalted status of the UP cadre of the elite Indian Administrative Service (IAS) was further reflected in the fact that it was given charge of training bureaucrats from other states. For example, when the state of Himachal Pradesh was formed in 1971, it was bureaucrats from UP who were called upon to help guide, train and lead the Himachalis on how to administer the new state. A senior bureaucratic posting within UP thus continues to be seen as an important milestone on the road to New Delhi and the upper echelons of the Indian state.²¹⁴

For these reasons, the UP bureaucracy may have at one point been the closest approximation to the Weberian ideal of a rational-legal state in India. Set against this image of a Weberian state, however, is a diametrically opposed view. The bureaucracy in UP is also characterized as deeply politicized, corrupt and weak, incapable of governing a sprawling society. Apart from the IAS, the rest of the bureaucracy is thought to be incapable of governing. Some suggest that UP's bureaucracy operates under two distinct logics: the modern-rational logic of India

²¹³ For example, a study conducted in the 1960s analyzing the behavioral orientation of Block Development Officers found bureaucrats in UP far better-suited to the task of development than those in the neighboring state of Rajasthan (Mathur 1972)

²¹⁴ Interviews with IAS officials within UP and New Delhi revealed a common belief that a position within the UP IAS cadre offered a major advantage for career mobility.

at the top, and a traditional, backwards logic of *Bharat* (Hindi for India) on the bottom; a concentration of committed, skilled professionals trying to implement policies through a mass of incompetent and corrupt petty officials.²¹⁵ This dichotomous portrayal of the state in UP suggests that patterns of organizational behavior *across* these two levels of the state should be distinct.

Fieldwork conducted inside UP's education bureaucracy suggests an element of truth to both of these views. I observed patterns of unified action as well as variation in behavior across the organizational hierarchy. Underlying this discontinuity, however, I find a common set of norms that are reflected in the shared expectations of public officials and non-state actors. As the findings will show, these bureaucratic norms approximate the legalistic model theorized in Chapter 1. Legalism is a conservative principle, whose aim is to preserve the letter of the law. Under legalism, bureaucrats that follow a strict interpretation of rules and procedures are viewed favorably. Action taken beyond a narrow interpretation of the rules, meanwhile, draws suspicion and reproach. Public officials in UP's education bureaucracy tend to view legalism as the ideal of a well-functioning state. This rest of this section is divided into two parts. The first part presents establishes legalistic norms inside the state, drawing on in-depth interviews and participant observation of bureaucrats located in different positions and functions across the administrative hierarchy. The second part draws on the experiences outside the state, based on interviews and participant observation with non-state actors, including citizens and civic agencies working in the education sector.

5.5.2. Inside the State

The first stream of evidence for legalism within the state comes from the interactions across the bureaucratic hierarchy. In stark contrast to the broad promotion of discussion across the bureaucratic chain in Himachal Pradesh, in UP, local officials learn not to raise questions or concerns with their senior colleagues in Lucknow. Consider a case from the local administration in District Sitapur. Local officials there faced a problem. With a population of almost 4.5 million, Sitapur is the eighth most populous district of Uttar Pradesh. The average district in UP, meanwhile, is just a little over half that size. To collect survey data on schools across the district, an activity that is required for annual district planning under SSA, officials in Sitapur had to cover essentially twice the population within the same timeframe as their colleagues in other offices. In addition, because part of the district is located in a flood-prone region, further delays and disruption during school data collection often ensued. Yet according to district officials, these ground realities were effectively suppressed, as they did not carry weight in the state office.

In one of many routine visits to the local education bureaucracy in Sitapur, I inquired about the official data on out-of-school children in the district. To my surprise, an officers who overheard my request answered back, "*We don't have time to produce real data. Even if we had the time to produce the data, I still wouldn't believe it.*" I paused and thought for a moment about what he was saying. Here I stood in the office dedicated solely to the production of education statistics for one of the largest districts of Uttar Pradesh, and the bureaucrats in charge did not have the slightest conviction in the data their office was producing. Our conversation went on and the purpose behind the data production process became clearer. As another official explained to me:

²¹⁵ See, for example, Jeffrey (2002).

Everyone here faces dabav [pressure] from the state office. We have to have all kinds of data prepared, and that too upon immediate request...The reality is that it would take months of regular work to produce the data they want in Lucknow. So we have to cut corners. Everyone knows these numbers are false. Nobody's a fool. We're aware that the system is riding on thin air. But still, we need to create a base upon which to plan. And if we don't show these numbers on time to the state office, we get in trouble. I'll get a call from someone saying that I'm being derelict in my duties. So we produce the data as required for the planning process.²¹⁶

This official was articulating the pressures he and his colleagues faced to meet the requirements of SSA's reporting and evaluation policy. Data for official reporting had to be produced for higher ups in Lucknow and New Delhi by whatever means necessary, since that was the standard by which bureaucratic performance was assessed. Throughout our conversations, local officials in Sitapur shifted between fits of exasperation and humor over the apparent senselessness of having to generate reports that did not correspond to ground realities in their district. The data production process offered a particularly vivid glimpse of norms in UP's education bureaucracy. The local officials in Sitapur all chimed in, each taking turns describing to me how data production took place:

To meet the 'targets' for SSA, bureaucrats from the top all the way down do a dance. First, sitting inside his classroom the headmaster makes up numbers...The reality is that teachers aren't going to go to each house to identify the out of school children. The highly motivated ones may try to do a quick survey of the school's catchment area [1 km radius]...Then those numbers arrive at the Block Administration, where the BRC [Block Resource Coordinator] handles them. He compiles the data and tries to make sure that enrollments are not declining or else he will face censure from his superiors. Sitting in his office, he adjusts the child enrollment data to meet his requirements. Then he submits the data to us here [the district office]...And in the same way, we report to the state level.²¹⁷

Their mocking tone aside, these officials did not fault their seniors in the SSA State Project Office for the “dance” around data production. They understood official reporting to be a critical part of implementing any major central government policy. One of the officials later went on to defend the relevance of the reporting process:

It is understandable. Like us, they [SSA State Project Office] too have to answer to someone above them. They face demands from Delhi to show that they are keeping a watch over things and conducting the policy transparently.²¹⁸

Like the demands placed on them, local officials understood that similar demands were placed on their seniors by the Ministry of Human Resource Development in New Delhi. Yet demands of this kind were hardly unique to Sitapur, or even to UP for that matter. They were a constant across my fieldwork. In other UP districts, in Uttarakhand, and even in the educationally forward state of Himachal Pradesh, officials described the pressures they faced to produce reports for SSA, and the consequences that arose from doing the dance. They too had little faith in the surveys carried out by school teachers and the numbers produced for official reports. One may characterize the “dance” as a normal feature of systematic pressures within the state.

²¹⁶ Field Visit, SSA Project Office, District Sitapur.

²¹⁷ Field Visit, SSA Project Office, District Sitapur.

²¹⁸ Focus Group Discussion, District Officials, SSA Project Office, District Sitapur.

What varied across public agencies, however, was the parallel, informal “*dance*” that took place alongside the official data production process. In Himachal Pradesh, the dance was deliberative, involving discussion and interrogation of what was happening in the field, separate and apart from the generation of reports. In UP, meanwhile, the dance was legalistic. Local officials were pressured to carry out implementation more strictly, not to question policies or debate ground realities with their seniors. Those who demonstrated an understanding of “*the process*” involving close adherence to procedure, generating official reports when asked, answering official information requests on time, and the like, were viewed favorably by their seniors. Those who raised questions, meanwhile, about SSA policies and tried to communicate local problems of implementation were seen to be acting out, and in some cases, even reprimanded.

Consider the case of Ms. Tyagi, a local official in the education bureaucracy of Saharanpur District, where I conducted fieldwork over the course of several months. Saharanpur is a district located far from Sitapur, in the northwestern corner of UP, yet there too I found similar norms at work. I first met Ms. Tyagi during a routine monitoring visit she had been conducting at a village primary school. She examined the official school records and went through a checklist of items with the school principal, including student enrollment, school infrastructure and provision of the midday meal, an exercise that in many ways resembled a financial audit. A few weeks later, Ms. Tyagi recounted with me her experiences implementing SSA policies. The conversation returned to her school monitoring visit, and she went on to describe one of her formative experiences:

*From the very start [of SSA], we've been unable to monitor the schools in our [administrative] block on our own. I have a babu [clerk] under me, as well as some staff. But they cannot effectively monitor, because there are too many schools. And anyway, they themselves are school teachers. Everyone knows this. How can someone from within the community of teachers control others? I brought this issue up with the district [administration] and other higher ups. I suggested we hire outside monitors from other agencies, but my seniors scolded me. I was told I had to “stick to the annual work plan.” I have learned that it is better not act independently or challenge the rules. So here I am today, conducting school inspections on my own.*²¹⁹

To the external observer, Ms. Tyagi's actions (and omissions) during her school inspection visits may be misconstrued as evidence for her being apathetic or unmotivated to go beyond the bare minimum of effort. Yet a more sustained conversation revealed that her personal preferences ran in the opposite direction of the observed behavior. Her idea to enlist the support of outside agencies for school monitoring was the correct response was based on a belief that it would help to ensure that standards of quality were met in the implementation of primary schooling. She even tried communicating these ideas to her co-workers and senior officials in the office. Yet her attempt to question and go beyond the official rules was taken as a sign of deviance, a break from the standard process, which was in turn greeted with suspicion from her colleagues. The experience only helped reinforce Ms. Tyagi's narrow interpretation of the rules and procedures.

This administrative “play” (*kehel*) or “dance” (*naach*), as various local officials referred to it, was seen as an integral part of carrying out their work. Whether it was school planning meetings, monitoring visits or the production of official statistics, organizational rituals provided an

²¹⁹ Interview with Block Education Officer, Saharanpur District, Uttar Pradesh, May 11, 2009.

opportunity to develop and convey an understanding of the legalistic norms governing the bureaucracy. Senior officials in Lucknow were no outsiders to this process. Much to the contrary, they provided the behavioral model and conducted the ritual-setting that allowed their subordinates to learn what was required of them. As a senior official from the SSA State Project Office explained:

*There are lots of political and sociocultural problems at the local level, but if you work according to the process outlined by SSA, then you can achieve results. We call in the poor performers to explain their difficulties and get them to focus on the process. I believe that if a clear process is established, then the end product will be of quality.*²²⁰

What this official meant by having poor performers “*explain their difficulties*” was not to have them share their experiences from the field, but rather to have them answer for why they could not follow the rules and meet their targets, as I observed directly on several occasions in the same office. The emphasis placed on the “*the process*” reflected norms for how a public agency ought to function. While the formal decentralization under SSA called for greater participation of local officials in the planning process, it also opened up the Department of Education, especially senior levels of bureaucracy, to interrogation. Yet the notion of engaging local officials in a broader discussion regarding how to conceptualize and carry out implementation was seen as peculiar, far from the norm.

The understanding maintained by senior officials was that, so long as local bureaucrats were abiding by the rules, there was no need for further questions. To the contrary, too much discussion was a sign of problems in the system. A highly decorated IAS officer, who spent several years as the Secretary of Education in Uttar Pradesh, the highest ranking post within the bureaucracy, described to me the “*problem*” of opening the floodgates of discussion with local bureaucrats. As he saw it, the role of senior officials was to delegate mandates, not to promote conversation with lower levels of the bureaucracy. An orderly system had no space for a give and take of questions and experiences around policy implementation. Instead, he took the upward flow of questions to be a sign of poor governance. As this official elaborated on the “*problem*” of engaging local officials:

*Why do your local officials and school teachers have questions about the rules? Apparently it is because the system is not delivering. Before any question reaches us [the Secretariat], it should be addressed at the block or district level. I would expect the subject matter of every question to be sorted out that way first. And if the number of questions and concerns does not come down, then the Basic Shiksha Adhikari (District Education Officer) should have to answer for it.*²²¹

For the highest ranking official of the education bureaucracy, deliberation across the hierarchy was taken as a sign of confusion, an absence of clarity regarding the rules. The upstream flow of questions also reflected the inadequacy of officials at the district to impose a similar order on their subordinates. The ritual “*dance*” across the hierarchy offered a way for local officials like those in Sitapur to show that they work according to the rules, meet their targets and do not raise questions about procedures and policies with others.

²²⁰ Senior Office, SSA State Project Office, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.

²²¹ Interview with former Secretary of Education, Uttar Pradesh.

5.2. Outside the State

The second stream of evidence for the prevalence of legalism within the state comes from the experiences of individuals and groups outside the state, including those working in the education sector. If bureaucratic norms tend to promote a strict adherence to rules hierarchies within the state, for individuals and agencies working outside the state they tend to promote a sense of marginalization. In their dealings with bureaucrats—both local administration and senior officials—civic actors face an uphill battle gaining a platform to discuss their needs.

Take the case again of Pratham, the education NGO introduced earlier in the motivating vignette on Azam Nagar. Pratham is among most respected NGOs working in primary education across India.²²² The organization's staff includes noted scholars, educationists, researchers and local fieldworkers across India. Within UP, Pratham runs library programs, alternative schools and other interventions for out-of-school children in urban slum communities across the state. According to the organization's senior staff based in Lucknow, the kind of support and cooperation they received from local officials in Agra District was an exception. As one staff member reported:

*Support from the state for our work has been negligible...And we see little variation in that across the districts we have worked in...Though we have found that district leadership can make a difference, like say in Agra, or in Bahraich. The officers there were eager to work with us. But these are rare cases. And anyway, the people [officials] who try to work differently don't get any support. They are the first to get kicked out of the system.*²²³

Pratham's fieldworkers in UP also tend to see themselves as “outsiders” in their interactions with the local state. As they expressed during interviews, tasks that required cooperation with the local state, such as enrolling children into the formal school system, would immediately hit a roadblock. Consequently, they learned to adjust their strategies and concentrate effort on program areas that did not require direct input from or engagement with the state. During focus group discussions with Pratham staff working in different parts of UP, another common thread emerged. They described a system in which each bureaucratic division operated like an independent fiefdom (*jagir*), with little coordination or communication across them:

*At the local-level if we need something from one division, we first have to get clearance from whoever sits at the very top of that subdivision. And across the subdivisions there is no coordination...this goes down to the local-most level. They are all running in parallel. And this makes it twice as difficult for us to get anything done at the local level.*²²⁴

More often than not, Pratham's field staff experienced little cooperation and high organizational barriers to entry, across subdivisions and levels of the UP state.

One may suppose that these experiences were unique to Pratham. As a high-profile NGO whose work garners much attention from the media and researchers across the world, perhaps the education bureaucracy was threatened by the organization's status. However, fieldwork conducted

²²² To learn more about Pratham, visit: <http://www.pratham.org/>.

²²³ Interview with senior staff member, Pratham, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.

²²⁴ Focus Group Discussion, local field staff, Pratham, Uttar Pradesh.

with local, far less prominent NGOs across UP revealed similar experiences with the state. Public agencies, including those working in domains outside of education, would often fail to cooperate or support their work. According to a staff member of a local NGO with a rural health mission in the far-flung district of Lalitpur:

*When a public official here [in Lalitpur] sees that a NGO is working in the same field as them, at the district or block level, he immediately expresses reluctance to work with them. "If we are doing this work then why do we need you?" they will say to us.*²²⁵

Both he and the senior staff at Pratham described situations of public officials in UP “bossing around” (*dadagiri*) their fieldworkers. Local bureaucrats would try to dictate the rules and procedures that these organizations had to follow in carrying out their work if they wanted cooperation from the local state.

In their relations with agencies outside the state, these officials were reproducing the legalistic norms governing relations within the state. As outsiders trying to work alongside the bureaucratic system, these NGOs developed their own coping strategies. For example, they learned to seek out individual allies within the state who may be willing to break from standard practice now and again, as was the case for the block official who coordinated with Pratham’s fieldworkers in Agra District. Yet these instances of going beyond standard practice were rare because they carried risks for the bureaucrats involved, who faced pressures within the state to conform.

A final stream of evidence for legalistic norms within the state comes from the experiences of Mahila Samakhya, a quasi-public agency devoted to women’s empowerment in Uttar Pradesh. Mahila Samakhya operates according to a very different set of norms from the education bureaucracy. In contrast to the legalism that predominates within UP’s education bureaucracy, the norms governing Mahila Samakhya more closely approximates the deliberative model expounded in Chapter 1. The normative clash between these organizations provides some of the clearest evidence of the nature of bureaucratic norms governing the education bureaucracy.

Mahila Samakhya is a quasi-public agency for women’s literacy and empowerment. It was launched as an experimental program by India’s central government as part of India’s 1986 National Policy on Education, which articulated the need to redress gender imbalances in education.²²⁶ Informed by the view that India’s bureaucratic approach to planning was ill-suited to the task of redressing inequalities facing women from disadvantaged backgrounds, planners in New Delhi launched the program as an alternative, bottom-up model of governance on behalf of women.²²⁷

Mahila Samakhya is financed by India’s central government and overseen by a committee comprised of central and state government officials. Crucially, it is an autonomous organization that has formal recognition within the state while also enjoying the flexibility to determine its own internal procedures and strategies for carrying out its mission. Mahila Samakhya technically falls

²²⁵ Interview with local NGO, Lalitpur District, Uttar Pradesh.

²²⁶ As the 1986 National Policy on Education declared, “*The empowerment of women is possibly the most critical pre condition for the participation of girls and women in the educational process.*”

²²⁷ Mahila Samakhya began as a pilot in three states (Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Karnataka), in a handful of districts having low rates of female literacy and school participation amongst girls. The agency is now active in nine states, covering 12,000 villages across 60 administrative districts of India. Mahila Samakhya Uttar Pradesh operates in 4,700 villages spread over seventeen districts of the state, and has a network of more than 4,300 women’s groups.

under the Department of Education in Uttar Pradesh and aids in the implementation of critical programs for disadvantaged girls. Instead of pursuing the policy targets enforced by public officials in Lucknow, Mahila Samakhya operates according to a different set of norms and objectives. Norms governing Mahila Samakhya promote participation among local field staff and village women's groups, encourage communication and interrogation of the rules and hierarchies, and encourage flexibility in the interpretation of policies.

Notwithstanding its formal autonomy from the rest of the state, Mahila Samakhya's deliberative approach to governance has often put it at odds with other public agencies. While the organization has received accolades in the media for the work it has done, particularly in the domain of girls' education, the Department of Education has come in conflict with Mahila Samakhya over how it conducts its internal operations. As a senior official within the education bureaucracy explained:

*Mahila Samakhya UP has done a lot, but still lots of gaps remain. You can't segregate yourself from the mainstream system. The government's education scheme provides you with a framework to elaborate on and experiment. But the point is that you need to implement things as per the scheme. Don't deviate from the scheme.*²²⁸

The 'scheme' this official was referring to had to do with policies surrounding an alternative schooling program for out-of-school girls. The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) scheme, as it is officially known, targets girls from disadvantaged communities who have dropped out of school and provides them with a special, residential education program for two years. In its implementation of the KGBV scheme across select districts of UP, Mahila Samakhya had, in the bureaucracy's view, 'deviated' by not applying official standards related to school infrastructure, teacher hiring procedures, and the like.

At a more mundane level, Mahila Samakhya staff would often question what they interpreted as the 'rigid' policies and procedures of the state, raising the ire of officials inside the bureaucracy, who were not accustomed to such norms. Meanwhile, officials in Mahila Samakhya, the legalistic norms of the education bureaucracy stifling:

*Resistance is very stiff to the way we work. In the state office we are here networking with Government agencies, trying to orient the bureaucracy about our work. We have to interact with people at different levels throughout the administration. At times we are able to get support from a District Magistrate, who might personally just want to support innovations. But then maintaining their support is never easy.*²²⁹

Although intermittent conflicts would erupt at the state-level, more often the conflict with public agencies would occur at the local-level, in the course of carrying out field operations. Through its district-level field offices, Mahila Samakhya oversees a network of (largely Dalit) women that come from disadvantaged backgrounds. It organized the women into associations (*mahila sanghas*). As Mahila Samakhya's local staff have attempted to guide and support the women's associations to organize and make collective demands on the state, conflicts with local district officials have often taken place.

²²⁸ Interview with senior official, Department of Education, Uttar Pradesh.

²²⁹ Interview with Senior Official, Mahila Samakhya Uttar Pradesh.

Consider the Midday Meal program operated by Mahila Samakhya. As part of a government order, Mahila Samakhya was given official charge of running the school lunch program through its women's groups in thirty villages in each of twelve districts across the state. At the start of the program, conflicts often would take place between the women's groups and the school headmaster and gram pradhan of the village panchayat. In some cases, school headmasters would not cooperate with the women in charge of cooking the school lunches. They would arrive to school late and fail to provide the daily student attendance numbers on time, which would lead to delays in cooking. But when local field staff would report such cases to local officials, they were usually turned away.²³⁰ The district head at one of Mahila Samakhya's field offices put it aptly when she said, "*They [local administration] have a problem with us because we don't bow in front of them.*"

The failure to observe officials rules and hierarchies was taken as an affront by local officials, evidence that Mahila Samakhya was operating according to another set of rules. Moreover, the agency's official status as a separate women's empowerment program within the education bureaucracy did not confer it authority within the state. As a local official in the education bureaucracy put it brashly during an interview: "*Mahila Samakhya... What is this 'Mahila Samakhya'? We are not required to work with them. They have no standing within the state.*"²³¹ The problem, as I detail later on, was not merely that Mahila Samakhya was organizing Dalit women against traditional gender norms and caste hierarchies. That too was a challenge. But even more than that, Mahila Samakhya's field staff did not adhere to norms within the local education bureaucracy. They failed to follow appropriate the rules and hierarchies governing the system. Having developed a more deliberative, participatory approach to organization, Mahila Samakhya had effectively rejected legalism. By normatively segregating itself from the rest of the education bureaucracy, the agency became an outcast within the state.

5.6. Nested Cases of Implementation

In the previous section, I established the presence of legalism within the education bureaucracy of Uttar Pradesh. I showed that officials across the bureaucratic hierarchy adhere tightly to official rules and procedures while upholding organizational hierarchies. Further, I explored how civic actors outside the state understand and respond to legalism. This section now turns to a series of case studies demonstrating how legalism within UP's education bureaucracy leads to the implementation outcomes in Uttar Pradesh. They offer fine-grained evidence for how legalistic norms influence bureaucratic behavior across a variety of contexts and situations, how civic actors respond to these behaviors, and how the combination of bureaucratic and civic action leads to various outcomes of interest.

The cases examined here analyze the following three implementation problems: (1) school infrastructure planning and provision, (2) the Midday Meal program, and (3) the functioning of schools and educational services. The cases are drawn from fieldwork conducted within the state, district and village. I analyze the mechanisms through which bureaucratic norms generate outcomes for each case, and test those mechanisms against alternative hypotheses. Specifically, I analyze the

²³⁰ Focus group discussions with women's groups in multiple districts of Uttar Pradesh.

²³¹ Interview with local official, Saharanpur District, Uttar Pradesh.

role of (1) particularism and capture by the political system and (2) public apathy brought about by social divisions and caste inequalities. Once we take account of these alternatives, bureaucratic norms continue to show their impact over policy implementation.

5.6.1. School Infrastructure Provision

In this sub-section I examine the problem of school infrastructure planning and provision, which is overseen by the State Project Office for SSA. Opening new school buildings might appear relatively straightforward, especially in comparison to more complex tasks such as monitoring school teachers and ensuring the quality of educational services. However, we should not be quick to dismiss the challenges public agencies face in expanding school infrastructure. Government schools in rural Uttar Pradesh have long been politicized spaces (Kingdon and Muzammil 2003). They are typically the only government buildings within walking distance of a village, and serve as prime local real estate for holding “official” meetings between the village panchayat and other state functionaries. Crucially, they also operate as voting booths for elections. For these reasons, dominant upper caste groups historically exerted influence over the placement of government schools, even if their own children may have attended private schools. Meanwhile, the habitations that truly needed schools were often the last ones to receive them.

Central government programs like SSA gave state officials significant resources to help undo the historical inequities associated with uneven school placement. With a dedicated SSA project office in charge of infrastructure provision, independent of other divisions, the education bureaucracy in UP also had the autonomy to carry out school infrastructure expansion with presumably less interference. A former State Director for SSA in Uttar Pradesh described the benefits of having a separate project office that was free from other subdivisions of the education bureaucracy:

Planning under SSA has taken a project mode, almost like an autonomous organization. That organizational divide has protected us from the routine politics facing the Department of Basic Education, allowing us to focus on the development side. The Directorate [of Basic Education] has kept up that part of the routine. And to our benefit, we have been insulated from various political demands. That space has been critical for planning. We could stay busy expanding infrastructure without being bogged down by systemic issues.²³²

As this senior official pointed out, the organizational autonomy enjoyed by SSA planners gave them the space to concentrate efforts on infrastructure expansion. The adherence to divisional boundaries helped shield bureaucrats in charge of infrastructure expansion from the routine pressures facing other subdivisions of the state.

Yet the organizational autonomy experienced by the SSA State Project Office did not translate down to the local level, and officials in Lucknow were well aware of that fact. In villages across UP, upper caste groups continued to exert influence over school placement decisions. To provide marginalized communities with access to primary schooling, the local

²³² Interview with former State Project Director, SSA, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.

bureaucracy would have to find ways to circumvent the pressure of dominant groups. Another senior official within the SSA State Project Office described these local challenges:

*Providing socially disadvantaged groups access...now that is always a tough issue. The fact lies that the elementary school is not only place of learning, but also the election booth. And that has always played a very crucial role in planning—which village, majra [section] and basti [hamlet] to target. These things are very politically decided. The entire system is politicized, down to the gram pradhan [village council head].*²³³

While recognizing the continued influence of local village politics, the same officer stressed the importance of official rules and procedures in school infrastructure planning. The strict adherence to these rules was understood as the bureaucracy's first line of defense against outside interference. According to the SSA policy framework, and more recently, the Right to Education Act, every village is required to have access to primary schooling in accordance with certain criteria regarding school distance and child population size. For example, villages are required to have access to a primary school within 1 km distance.

The strict interpretation of schooling “needs” based on the official criteria allowed the education bureaucracy to plan school infrastructure expansion efficiently. However, senior bureaucrats were wary of the possibility that local bureaucrats would be unable to carry out school construction in accordance with these criteria. As one official explained:

*From the point of view of SSA, providing access to education is the only relevant issue, and as long as we can show that a habitation has the need for a new school building, then our requirements for planning are met. At the grassroots level, my guess is that politics still plays a very important role. But we avoid that at the planning stage by sticking to our own needs-based assessment.*²³⁴

The narrow interpretation of needs within the planning process allowed officials to bypass any discussion or debate around what the actual needs facing particular regions or districts may be. A similarly strict adherence to official criteria characterized the process for charting the progress of the local bureaucracy. Senior officials applied a standardized checklist to monitor district-level performance and match (reported) outcomes against administrative goals and targets.

According to senior bureaucrats, the review of official targets at regular intervals provided an efficient way to determine how well infrastructure development was taking place across the state. It also provided a means to evaluate the performance of local officials. A senior bureaucrat in the SSA State Project Office described how his office carried out performance appraisals:

We check to see if what they [local administrators] tell us about the schools is correlated with the official data. We try to make the evaluation objective. We say to the district officers that, if you visited forty schools over the last month, show us the record and outcome of those visits. We have made a target for the BSA [District Education Officer] and ABSA [Block Education Officer] to visit forty schools per month. Twelve officers multiplied over forty schools means four hundred and eighty school visits per month in each district. And the outcomes need to be appropriately

²³³ Interview with senior official, SSA State Project Office, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. Lucknow

²³⁴ Senior Official, SSA State Project Office, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.

*documented and forwarded to us. Based on that assessment, we can say that 15-20% are doing excellent work, 15-20% are doing badly, and rest we consider average, or medium, quality.*²³⁵

Instead of adjusting the evaluation process to the varying conditions across regions and localities, senior bureaucrats applied of a uniform set of standards to all 71 districts of the state. Officials took that to be a “*rational*” approach to implementation, and a more “*objective*” and “*fair*” basis for evaluating performance. These observations at the state level compel one to ask: how far down the chain of infrastructure development does legalism travel? How do local bureaucrats carry out the provision of school infrastructure given the realities of local politics? Even senior officials in Lucknow were skeptical that the strict, “needs-based” approach they took for planning school infrastructure expansion corresponded to ground realities.

To further assess the mechanisms of implementation, the analysis now moves to the local level. Does legalism carry forward to influence the behavior of local bureaucrats as they implement school infrastructure projects? Or alternatively, do the particularistic pressures of local politics in UP lead to bureaucratic capture? Recall from the earlier discussion that existing scholarship suggests that the particularism in clientelistic settings like UP undermine the implementation of universal policies like primary education. According to that view, public agencies are effectively captured by clientelistic politics, which redirect public resources like infrastructure projects to their constituents (Keefer and Khemani 2004; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). Within UP, targeted programs like the Ambedkar Village Scheme are thought to reinforce particularism based on caste and obstruct the fair and even delivery of public goods. How does the legalistic portrayal of the bureaucracy, which suggests that public officials adhere strictly to rules and procedures, square against the dominant discourse of particularism and capture?

To test the theoretical mechanisms of legalism against the hypothesis of political capture, I conducted fieldwork in two very different districts of Uttar Pradesh: District Saharanpur and District Sitapur. Saharanpur is a wealthy district in fast-growing agricultural belt of Western Uttar Pradesh, which is close to New Delhi. It is also a political stronghold of the BSP and its party chief Mayawati. Sitapur, meanwhile, is a much poorer district in central UP that is closer to Lucknow, the state capital. Political control in Sitapur is divided evenly between the BSP and its competitor, the Samajwadi Party (SP). A summary of district socioeconomic indicators is presented in Table 5.7 in the chapter Appendix. Contrary to the image of capture, evidence from local-level fieldwork across these two districts reveals a more complex dynamic. While the particularistic pressures of caste politics set constraints on what public agencies can do, local bureaucrats appeal to official rules and procedures to assert their authority over process of school infrastructure development.

When planning school infrastructure projects, officials in both districts adopt a strict interpretation of rules and procedures, overriding the demands of local communities. The adherence to the official “needs-based” criteria, allows local officials to eschew community involvement, and the politics that comes with it. As an official from Saharanpur explained:

Our infrastructure targets come from above [the Education Department]. For new schools, we must ensure that each school is at a maximum 1 km distance from the village and serves a child population of no more than 300. Sometimes the gram pradhan [village council head] tries to push

²³⁵ Interview with Senior Official, State Project Office, SSA, Lucknow.

*us to build the school closer to his supporters and interfere with our inspections, but we have our norms to stand by, and for that we have the backing of the Department.*²³⁶

As this official pointed out, village leaders often try to influence the placement of schools. They may even try to capitalize on school infrastructure projects and pilfer funds. To encourage community participation over school placement invites unwanted interference in the process. The close adherence to official standards allows the bureaucracy to work around community demands.

That is not to say that local agencies do not face political interference. As part of local-level fieldwork, I examined how bureaucrats responded to the particularistic requirements of the Ambedkar Village program while implementing school infrastructure projects. The Ambedkar Village Scheme is characterized by many as a prime example of particularism, by which the pro-Dalit party captures public goods provision by redirecting infrastructure projects in favor of its political base (Jeffrey, Jeffery et al. 2008). The Ambedkar Village program may “capture” influence school infrastructure development in two ways. First, the policy requires certain school facilities, such as girls’ toilets and school boundary walls, to be provided to schools located in politically designated Ambedkar Villages on a first priority basis. Second, the policy calls for additional monitoring of village infrastructure and inspections of school facilities within these villages, again on a priority basis.

The political pressure to target Ambedkar Villages with school infrastructure may appear to be a textbook case of capture. However, local officials in both districts assert bureaucratic authority over the policy’s implementation. They do so by interpreting the policy legalistically, treating it as just another, narrow criteria to follow alongside SSA’s standard criteria for school infrastructure development. The room for bureaucratic control over what theoretically should be a politically-controlled process stems in part from the practical realities of implementation. In practice, the list of priority villages is quite long, and gets updated annually, providing space for the bureaucracy to make its own decisions. As part of my fieldwork, I collected the Ambedkar Village list for the previous three years (2007-2010) from local authorities in District Saharanpur. For any given school year, the list covers between 1,000-1,500 villages. In many cases, primary schools on the Ambedkar Villages list meet the education bureaucracy’s own criteria for infrastructure development under SSA. The practical overlap allows the bureaucracy to apply its own narrow interpretation of “need” on top of the Ambedkar Village list. As one official explained:

*For school building improvements, we are given a full list of villages to inspect first, which includes the Ambedkar Villages. We can also take proposals from the village pradhan as well, but only after our norms are met. In the end, the work has to be done according to our norms. On this we don’t budge.*²³⁷

The same official went on to describe the Ambedkar Village scheme in similarly legalistic terms. In his mind, it was not a program to assess and improve public infrastructure for *Dalit* communities²³⁸, but instead, a narrow directive for the bureaucracy to pursue infrastructure development without

²³⁶ Interview with local education official, District Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh.

²³⁷ Block Education Officer, Department of Education, Saharanpur.

²³⁸ In fact, from my fieldwork it is not clear that the Ambedkar Village Program actually targets Dalit communities as advertised. I matched the Ambedkar Village list provided to me by local authorities in District Saharanpur with India Census data. Based on the matching, I found that the average Ambedkar Village in District Saharanpur had a SC population of 26 percent, not a majority of Dalits as the official version of the policy declares.

having to consult the panchayat, local communities or civic agencies. With that narrow mandate in mind, local officials in the education bureaucracy have used the Ambedkar Village Program as an opportunity to concentrate further authority in their own hands, conducting school inspections and targeting infrastructure according to the “official needs” of SSA.

Consider the case of Rajori, an Ambedkar Village located approximately 25 km from Saharanpur district headquarters. Village infrastructure in Rajori had recently been upgraded at the time of fieldwork, including new village footpaths and electrical poles. The primary and middle schools in the village also had good infrastructure: large, freshly painted classrooms, clean kitchen sheds and a working water supply. A specially designated girls’ bathroom (*balika sauchalay*) was newly built, and according to several female students at the school, was in full working order. Rajori’s primary school headmaster described recent monitoring visits by the local bureaucracy:

*We receive monitoring visits from officials about once a month. Sometimes it is from within the Education Department, but it can be officials from other departments as well... The school boundary wall and girls’ bathroom were recently constructed under the Ambedkar Village Scheme. Anyone can come at any time to inspect us. It is time-consuming, and takes away from our teaching time, but it also keeps us on our toes. They [the monitors] are especially concerned to know whether the girls’ bathroom is working.*²³⁹

Both teachers and the village gram pradhan credited the local education bureaucracy for initiating the infrastructure improvements at the school. According to the school headmaster, the Ambedkar Village program had initiated an “*inspection regime*” in which local bureaucrats would pay routine visits to make sure the infrastructure was at par with official standards. Yet these official inspections were not confined to Rajori. Participant observation with local officials along with fieldwork conducted in non-Ambedkar villages at some distance away from Rajori revealed that the local bureaucracy had carried out similar school inspections in those villages as well. For example, during my stay in Pundail, an interior village not too far from Rajori, I observed local officials from the education bureaucracy make routine monitoring visits on the same days that they visited Rajori, inspections that led to the construction of girls’ bathrooms in Pundail’s primary and middle schools as well.

One might suppose that the implementation of these infrastructure projects and school inspections was simply the result of political pressures from BSP leadership in Saharanpur. Given the high concentration of support for the BSP within the district, including Mayawati’s own electoral constituency, Saharanpur occupies a most-likely setting within UP for the bureaucracy to be responsive to political pressures. To test whether local political domination by the BSP was driving these behaviors, I conducted similar fieldwork in District Sitapur. As I mentioned before, Sitapur is a much poorer district that is politically split between the BSP and the Samajwadi Party (SP), its main political rival in UP.

In District Sitapur, the local education bureaucracy was instructor to prioritize the construction of boundary walls and conduct follow-up inspections in primary schools based in designated Ambedkar Villages. Yet there too, the local education bureaucracy took a narrow interpretation of the SSA mandate and applied it to the school infrastructure and monitoring directives of the Ambedkar Village program, overriding the particular needs or demands of local communities. In some cases, after seeing the boundary wall constructed, local leaders based in

²³⁹ Primary school teacher, Saharanpur.

Ambedkar Villages would make demands for additional infrastructure. As a local official from district headquarters in Sitapur recounted:

The pradhan of Khanpur [an Ambedkar Village] caught hold of us as we were approaching to assess the school's boundary wall. He started making demands asking for an additional hand pump and classroom, even though the school had the full facilities. I explained that we have strict guidelines for all school infrastructure. Even the boundary wall I told him was being provided only after an assessment by the [education] department.²⁴⁰

For this official, the “assessment” of school needs came not from the community itself, but from the official directives of the state. School inspections, according to him, were an opportunity to impose “order” on the chaotic demands of local communities. In some cases, however, the rigid adherence to official norms and mandates led the bureaucracy to impose an order that failed to meet the legitimate infrastructure needs in schools. Take for instance the case of Primary School Arthana. On my very first visit to the village, construction had been taking place for new bathrooms at the primary school. The school teacher, Mr. Dubey, greeted me outside and explained how the local bureaucracy came to “assess needs” at the school:

The local officials came and told us that girls' bathrooms were being implemented across the block and that our school was on the list. I showed them that we had bathrooms in place, built by the gram pradhan. Instead, I explained that we needed a boundary wall to protect the school from all the animals and vehicles that would cross through the main yard. 'There is a backlog for the boundary wall', they told me, because Ambedkar Villages had first priority. In the meantime, we were told to have the girls' bathrooms built.²⁴¹

In fairness to local officials, the original set of bathrooms in Arthana was in desperate need of repair. Based on that criterion, the decision to upgrade the bathrooms may have been justified. More importantly, however, the narrow interpretation of need-based policies by local bureaucrats led them to pursue school infrastructure development in a uniform manner without local input.

Nearly eight months after my initial visit, a boundary wall had been built for Primary School Arthana, though Mr. Dubey was no longer teaching there. According to local officials in Sitapur, the wall had been initiated after an assessment based on a later round of inspections for the Ambedkar Village Program. Like SSA policies, the Ambedkar Village policy in Sitapur provided another means by which the local state could impose a legalistic order over the implementation process. Schools that “needed” girls’ bathrooms would get them, whether or not that corresponded to local demands, and boundary walls would get built, but only when the local bureaucracy identified a requirement on its own.

The above findings offer little evidence of outright capture of the local state. Public officials working in these two very different districts carried out the task of school infrastructure provision in similar ways. In both cases, officials took a legalistic approach to infrastructure development, adopting a narrow interpretation of “needs” as part of planning and inspection. To be sure, particularism in UP’s political system has set important limits to how fair and consistent a legalistic bureaucracy can be. Schools that were not on the Ambedkar Village list are likely to have missed

²⁴⁰ Interview with local official, District Education Office, Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh.

²⁴¹ Interview with primary school teacher, Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh.

out on necessary infrastructure improvements. Yet the dominant metaphor of capture does not adequately describe the nature of political influence over the bureaucracy.²⁴² Local public agencies in UP adopted a narrow, legalistic interpretation of the Ambedkar Village Scheme and carried it out as part of their official mandate for infrastructure development under SSA. Particularistic constraints notwithstanding, bureaucrats have implemented school infrastructure expansion with remarkable consistency across an exceptionally large and diverse state.

5.6.2. Midday Meal Program: From Lucknow to Langra

The above case study analyzed the mechanisms through which UP's education bureaucracy has carried out school infrastructure projects. Contrary to expectations, public official effectively worked around particularism, abiding by official rules and procedures to carry out a remarkable school expansion. We also saw that particularistic pressures set certain limits to what the bureaucracy could accomplish. In this section I turn to the task of service delivery, specifically the delivery of midday meals. In contrast to school infrastructure expansion, which requires comparatively little community input, the Midday Meal program demands repeated interaction between public agencies and local communities. As I find, however, the bureaucracy's legalistic approach to implementation dampens the participation of parents, particularly within the context of entrenched social inequalities and exclusionary practices based on caste. Local public agencies are unable to support marginalized groups in their efforts to monitor the school lunch program, which leads to irregularity and poor quality in service delivery. Instead, local agencies tend to reinforce social inequalities based on caste and gender, which further disempowers marginalized segments of society. The case highlights the mismatch between legalistic norms, which promote a rigid application of rules, and the

Senior officials within the state are cognizant of the many problems that plague the Midday Meal program in UP. From the pilferage of food grains to cases of children falling sick from rotten food, local media across UP has shown no mercy in its coverage of the program's failures. Yet how officials in Lucknow understand the "problem" of implementing the Midday Meal program, what the policy is and what actions it demands of them sheds light on the mechanisms through which public agencies in UP marginalize citizens in the implementation process. First, in a pattern much akin to infrastructure provision and regional planning, the Midday Meal program in UP is again governed by a separate sub-division of the state that has little practical interaction with the rest of the education bureaucracy. In fact, officials in the Midday Meal program office do not understand their roles in terms of education policy at all. As one of the senior officials in the office helped clarify for me:

*The administration of the Midday Meal program...it is basically a financial management scheme. The state government (our office), gives the funds to the District Magistrate (DM), who is the nodal officer at the local level. And under him, the Basic Shiksha Adhikari [District Education Office], he is the real person responsible. And for that he has his own team.*²⁴³

²⁴² I call it a "metaphor" of capture because studies of clientelism often assert state capture without demonstrating it empirically.

²⁴³ Interview with senior official, Midday Meal Program, Uttar Pradesh.

Effectively, officials in Lucknow have interpreted the policy as a financial hand-off from the state office down to district headquarters. Once the hand-off is made, local district administration was placed in the drivers' seat and officials in Lucknow were there tally the results of implementation on the ground. Beyond the financial transaction, the Midday Meal Program also carried a set of rules that had to be enforced:

*The Government of India (GOI) provides strict norms for the Midday Meal Program. There has to be a kitchen shed, which is financed through a one-time grant of Rs. 60,000. Also, there must be containers for the food, utensils, etc. Then cooks must be hired at the local level. We don't need them to be full time cooks, but we do require hygienic conditions.*²⁴⁴

The interpretation of the policy in terms of financial transfers and the application of rules concerning infrastructure, cooking supplies and "hygiene" were essentially the same terms that local officials used when discussing the policy. Unlike their counterparts in Lucknow, however, they had to attend to the trials and conflicts around the maintenance of hygiene and other such matters, which took place at the level of the panchayat, village and primary school. Senior bureaucrats, meanwhile, were wary of the reliability of information they received regarding the actual position of the Midday Meal program:

*How do we know how many students are actually availing of the MDM? We have designated a school, block and district-level Midday Meal register. Student attendance is filled by teachers, so exactly along those same lines we have our own school-level register.*²⁴⁵

These data carry much of the same problem as all other official school data. They call for the "dance" that I described in previous section, where public employees, starting with the school teacher, all the way up to the IAS official who heads the division, have to adjust the numbers to meet their requirements. Problems with the Midday Meal are further complicated by the fact that school teachers and the gram pradhan of the panchayat, who officially oversee the program, have opportunities to collude. A common story across UP is the inflation of the Midday Meal attendance registers by teachers and the gram pradhan, who work "hand-in-glove" together to siphon food grains. Another senior bureaucrat working in the Midday Meal Program office explained what he thought needed to be done to address that problem:

*Problems take place at the panchayat level because there is no computerization. Right now we get the information from the district electronically. However, the actual information goes this way: [drawing in my field notebook] 'Village → Block → District → State.' So we get the data on a monthly basis. But we are facing problems here because the 'real' data we are unable to get. Once we are able to get this information at the village level, then the scheme will run better.*²⁴⁶

For officials in Lucknow, the problem of implementing the Midday Meal program effectively is essentially a problem of information. Even with the decentralized planning model under SSA, gaps in implementation can take place, particularly between the nodes 'Village → Block'. As the official explained, once transactions across those two nodes were digitized,

²⁴⁴ Interview with accountant, Midday Meal Program, Uttar Pradesh.

²⁴⁵ Interview with senior official, Midday Meal Program, Uttar Pradesh.

²⁴⁶ Interview with senior official, Midday Meal Program, Uttar Pradesh.

then many of the problems facing the Midday Meal program would correct themselves. Decentralization, in its ideal form, meant digitization.

Yet even with digitized information fed by each panchayat to the state office, problems may well continue. If the school headmaster and pradhan had opportunities to collude when providing hand-written forms to the block-level official, what was preventing them from colluding while entering data directly into a computer? The task implementing the Midday Meal program involved determining what was actually taking place inside village primary schools and responding to that information in real time. That is precisely why such programs were placed in the hands of local communities:

*Unless the scheme is community owned, it can't run. The Government can try to push only so far. But the community has to take ownership. Unless and until the community takes ownership, it cannot be successful.*²⁴⁷

Yet the understanding of “community” here was again narrow. What officials in the Midday Meal Program office meant by “community” was not the plurality of social groups in a UP village, with all their attendant conflicts. Instead, they were referring to a particular local agency, the official Village Education Committee, and that too, not the entire “committee” but the village pradhan, who was officially head of the committee, and the one community member whose signature on the Midday Meal register was required for local officials to complete the transaction, and thus, discharge their duty:

*Wherever local participation is strong, by that I mean the pradhan, there the Midday Meal is running beautifully. Cooking utensils, high quality food grain, and other requirements are all there. If the Pradhan is very active, then it means a lot.*²⁴⁸

However, activating the pradhan in the appropriate way was not a straightforward matter, and certainly not something that could be done from Lucknow. Moreover, as others in the office had pointed out, collusion between the pradhan and headmaster was a persistent problem. When I asked state officials what had to be done in cases where the school teacher or gram pradhan did not cooperate with local officials, they offered legalistic solutions. As one official explained:

*The Supreme Court made a clear norm that teachers should not be involved in MDM. All of it is left to the village Panchayat or SHGs [Self Help Groups]...The MDM should be implemented via the panchayat, who can then delegate responsibilities to SHGs...If they face any problems with Midday Meal, then in each school we have painted on the wall the contact numbers of the District Coordinator and Basic Shiksha Adhikari [District Education Officer] for the community to call.*²⁴⁹

Their suggestion opened the door to several questions and possibilities. In cases where a problem came up, did the “community” call the relevant officials? Do local agencies respond to SHGs, women’s Self Help Groups that were given the task of overseeing the Midday Meal? How was a typical response carried out, and what did it consist of? Having exhausted the governance resources

²⁴⁷ Interview with senior official, SSA State Project Office, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.

²⁴⁸ Interview with senior official, Midday Meal Program, Uttar Pradesh.

²⁴⁹ Interview with senior official, Midday Meal Program, Uttar Pradesh.

of the Midday Meal Program office in Lucknow, I followed the implementation of school lunches further down the chain of governance.

Consider the case of Langra, one of the villages where I conducted fieldwork. The primary school in Langra had been having problems with its Midday Meal Program. As part of a recent government order, Mahila Samakhya, the quasi-public agency I introduced earlier, had been given the mandate to implement the Midday Meal Program through its women's groups in select villages. The women's group in Langra had recently taken charge of the program. One afternoon, I arrived at the primary school in Langra to find the headmaster along with the other teachers visibly irked by a women's group, which they felt was a breach of their control. Ironically, the same set of teachers had previously complained to me the Midday Meal program took time away from their teaching. Meanwhile, parents in Langra explained to me problems they had been facing with the Midday Meal program in their school:

*Sometimes the children tell us they have not gotten food or that it was too much less...Meanwhile, we see the headmaster invites his friends to play cards and they all eat the food.*²⁵⁰

As the women's association recalled during one of our focus group discussions, the headmaster would often inflate the student attendance register, diverting the extra food for his friends and other visitors. When the women's group took over the program, Mahila Samkahya's field office explained to them the official policy of the state, which required student attendance records to match the official register of food grains and other inputs used for meal, which could be inspected at any time by the local bureaucracy. Still, the women, who were Dalit and mostly illiterate, had to rely on the headmaster to provide the official attendance figure each day, which was then used to ensure that the correct amount of grain was being applied for cooking the meal.

Illiteracy did not prevent the women from keeping a check on the headmaster. Some had their children, who were enrolled at the school, count the student attendance each day, which they could then match with the official figure provided by the headmaster. They found that was continuing to inflate student attendance records, having the women make extra bread (*chapatis*), which he would then serve to his visitors. Unwilling to participate in the headmaster's scheme, the group devised their own plan to retaliate. Instead of making extra *chapatis* that would go to his friends, they started using the same amount of grains to make thicker *chapatis*, which they provided to the school children to enjoy during lunch.

Notwithstanding their attempts to subvert the headmaster, the women were at a significant disadvantage. The headmaster, who knew how to navigate the official system, lodged a formal complaint with the local bureaucracy against the group for mismanaging the Midday Meal and maintaining "unhygienic" conditions. He enlisted support from the gram pradhan, who was also head of the Village Education Committee (VEC), the formal village body for primary education recognized by the state. When officials came to inspect the school, the pair had the evidence ready to support their case. The women's group struggled to explain that the headmaster had been inflating the daily attendance register. Their poor literacy and lack of confidence in speaking to a public official made it difficult for them to present their case convincingly. Unable to reach a final verdict, local officials from the education bureaucracy left the women's group with a stern warning.

²⁵⁰ Focus group discussion with parents in Langra.

That experience was enough to discourage the women from calling the local bureaucracy back again. Meanwhile, the headmaster took matters one step further, and with support of the panchayat pradhan, lodged a case against the women's group for cooking the Midday Meal under "unhygienic conditions." Given the backlog facing the local judiciary, the case would not be heard for several months, and in the meantime, a judicial stay order was placed against the women's group, effectively removing their official authority over the Midday Meal. The women's group had the option to file a complaint against the headmaster, which would have been in line with the approach to community governance that bureaucrats in Lucknow had envisioned: *"If there are any problems with MDM, in each school we have painted on the wall the contact numbers of the District Coordinator and BSA [District Education Officer] for the community to call."*

The women's group made a courageous attempt to try out that approach. They protested at the district office of the local education bureaucracy. They even pointed out that the headmaster was discriminating against them based on caste, as he had organized group of upper caste residents to file complaints against the Dalit women. Yet even in District Saharanpur, where Dalits have unrivaled political representation within the state, claims about casteism did not carry weight outside the formal judicial system. To claim caste discrimination, they would have to file an official case was lodged against the headmaster. Meanwhile, the school headmaster, who was familiar with the ins and outs of the official system, knew how to frame his complaint regarding poor hygiene with the local bureaucracy, and also had the confidence to pursue legal recourse against the women's group. Rather than engaged in a lengthy legal proceeding that they understood little about, the women's group decided to drop the matter and focus their attention on other pressing issues in their village.

The situation in Langra might appear to be a straightforward case of upper caste domination in a highly unequal society, which in many ways it was. The practice of caste inequality and exclusion within rural UP society has shown little sign of retreat. To find poor Dalit women marginalized by upper castes is hardly surprising. Yet the actions and omissions of the local bureaucracy in Saharanpur were not merely a consequence of structural inequalities. Indeed, in the case of school infrastructure projects, the local bureaucracy often exerted itself over upper castes, overriding their demands. Nor was it necessarily the case that all local officials were personally biased against (Dalit) women's groups. Though some may have held such attitudes, participant observation and interviews with the local bureaucracy in Saharanpur suggested otherwise. Some bureaucrats even expressed a positive disposition towards the women's groups. In the above case, the block-level official who oversaw Langra Primary School was strongly in *favor* of having women's groups participate in the Midday Meal program:

*If you ask me, the Midday Meal program under Mahila Samakhya has gone well. The women are doing a good job. But what happens is that the competing party goes against the Dalit women, and they know we have strict rules covering the Midday Meal, so that becomes the locus of their political battles.*²⁵¹

By the officer's own admission, the women's groups organized by Mahila Samakhya were effective in implementing the Midday Meal program. Personally, she preferred working with them rather than the gram panchayat and Village Education Committee, as they had stronger ties to the Dalit community, which utilized the primary school. Most of the women in Langra's women's association had children attending the primary school, which raised their personal stakes to ensure the food was

²⁵¹ Interview with local education official, Saharanpur District, Uttar Pradesh.

properly cooked. Notwithstanding her positive disposition, however, norms within the local bureaucracy encouraged a rigid adherence to official rules and hierarchy. In the case of Langra, she had to answer formal complaints that the meals prepared by the women's group were "unhygienic." The rules regarding hygiene came straight from Lucknow, and their strict enforcement was considered paramount within the bureaucracy:

*We are told to go through all the registers. But the most emphasis is on the Midday Meal. The Midday Meal has become god... news of any problem goes straight to Delhi now, or it goes directly to Lucknow... The quality of the food is frequently bad, and so we are told to inspect for hygiene.*²⁵²

Yet the issue of "hygiene" in rural UP is more sensitive than meets the eye. In the case of Dalit women cooking the Midday Meal, it immediately draws in the currents of caste, and the rituals of purity and pollution that come with it. For the school headmaster and panchayat pradhan at Langra, local support to combat the women's group on the grounds of "hygiene" was not difficult to gather. By village norms, the food cooked by the women's group was anyhow ritually polluted to start with, and upper caste groups were willing and able to mobilize collectively around that when local officials arrived. The women's group in Langra might have tried discussing the various issues at hand with the local official, how caste and gender dynamics in their village worked against them, but that would have required her do something very different from just applying the rules. The same local official in charge went on to describe how a similar case had unfolded at another primary school:

*I received the complaint [about the Midday Meal] one afternoon at 3:30pm. I got to the school by 4pm. The lentils (dal) were sitting in a bucket filled with maggots. When I inspected it more closely, it looked like someone had thrown the maggots on top. I doubt women could have done that. But the school headmaster and gram pradhan want to remove them [the women] from the school, and they find ways to seize control. And as officers, our first priority is to enforce the rules.*²⁵³

Legalism, as this official articulated it, curtailed the range of possible actions that she could take. When it came to areas of policy like the Midday Meal, which involved community dynamics within a highly unequal society, a strict adherence to the rules did not permit her to pursue the kinds of actions that may have helped the women's group effectively monitor the Midday Meal program. Neither could she attend to the special needs facing marginalized communities nor bend policies in their favor. Following the norms of the local state, she had to enforce the judicial stay on the women's group until a decision was reached in court. The outcome for Langra, according to many parents interviewed, was the ongoing pilferage of the Midday Meal program by the school headmaster and panchayat pradhan.

Before moving ahead, let us reconsider a plausible alternative explanation for the outcomes observes. Perhaps it was not legalism within the state that produced poor implementation of the Midday Meal program, but capture by members of the dominant, upper caste community. In contrast to school infrastructure projects, which were largely under the control of the bureaucracy, the Midday Meal program appears to be far more embedded in local communities, making it well-nigh impossible for any bureaucracy to intervene effectively. Given the realities of social exclusion and inequality across villages in UP, it would be hard to reject the hypothesis that dominant groups exert control, if not outright capture, over the Midday Meal program. However, that these findings

²⁵² Interview with Block Education Officer, Saharanpur District, Uttar Pradesh.

²⁵³ Interview with Block Education Officer, Saharanpur District, Uttar Pradesh.

are drawn from District Saharanpur, a high growth region that is also the political epicenter of Dalit politics and a stronghold of the BSP, makes it difficult to overlook the bureaucracy's inability to implement the program more effectively.

Yet the bureaucracy's legalistic approach to implementing the program seems not to have worked against elite domination. Senior bureaucrats in Lucknow, who oversee the program, take a very narrow understanding of "community" monitoring. As one official put it: "*The best is if the community monitors the program itself. Second best is inspections.*"²⁵⁴ By "community," this official meant the pradhan of the panchayat. In villages of Uttar Pradesh, however, "community" oversight implies local conflict, and the Midday Meal program is just one of its many sites. In its legalistic interpretation of the policy, the education bureaucracy is unable to recognize and respond to the conflicts underlying service delivery.

While this case helps us understand how marginalized citizens are disempowered by a legalistic state, it still raises some important questions. Can we attribute patterns of poor service delivery to norms governing the education bureaucracy? Or, are these outcomes the result of social divisions and inequalities in UP, divisions that, many argue, impede sustained collective action and generate a culture of "public apathy" around public services (Drèze and Sen 2002)? The next and final case study takes on the "public apathy" thesis by analyzing more closely the mechanisms through which legalism within the state affects policy implementation at the village level.

5.6.3. School Dysfunction in Pundail

The implementation outcomes in Pundail reflect the broader pattern observed in Saharanpur: good physical infrastructure yet very poorly functioning schools with low student retention. The case provides an opportunity to trace these outcomes back to specific behaviors undertaken by bureaucratic and civic actors. I selected Pundail as a case study village because it was precisely where one might expect social divisions to produce public apathy around primary education. A village highly fragmented along caste and economic lines, the study of Pundail also provides an opportunity to analyze the role of social inequality and local caste politics in more detail. As the findings demonstrate, notwithstanding local collective action and political representation by the BSP, legalistic norms within the local state marginalized the majority Dalit community in the village, contributing to the dysfunction of primary schooling in Pundail.

Located five kilometers off the main artery connecting Saharanpur to the adjacent district, Muzaffarnagar, the long, windy road leading to Pundail (pop. 2,500) had yet to be finished. Though not the most far-flung village, at about 30 km from district headquarters, it was not an easy place for bureaucrats to pay frequent monitoring visits. With the nearest bus stop was an hour by foot, reaching Pundail took some effort. Socioeconomic inequalities combined with highly fragmented caste composition made Pundail a highly unlikely candidate for local collective action around primary schooling. The village had a large population of Dalits (55%), Brahmins (20%), a handful of Baniyas (merchants) and multiple OBCs (Lohar, Kumhar and Saini).

²⁵⁴ Interview with Senior Official, Midday Meal Program, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.

Each of these groups lived in a separate section or neighborhood (*mohalla*) and had its own place of worship. The upper caste temple, the oldest in the village, was frequented by Brahmins and other upper castes, and was also the original site of the first local school. OBCs, meanwhile, had built their own temple near a lake at the opposite end of the village. Dalits, who were barred from entering either place of worship, had recently built their own temple, which bore a photograph of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on the gate outside. Finally, the village also had a few lower caste Sikh (*sardar*) families who had migrated relatively recently from Punjab, and were in the process of building a temple (*gurudwara*) for their own religious community. Within each category were multiple sub-caste groups.

Layered on top of caste divisions were growing socioeconomic inequalities. Pundail's economy centered on agriculture, mostly sugarcane and wheat production; local farms supplied a large sugar mill close by. The more affluent, upper caste landowners had their wealth on display with large, newly renovated houses and flashy motorcycles. Some boasted working in service professions, including a handful clerks, school teachers, a policeman and a lawyer. Meanwhile, most Dalit families had marginal landholdings and relied on physical labor to earn a living. The men worked as mechanics (*mistrees*), specializing in hand pumps, a village trade that had been passed on across generations. They travelled near and far in search of maintenance work, going as far as Delhi and other major cities. The women, meanwhile, stayed inside the village, performing most of the agricultural labor while at the same time managing the household.

Social distinctions across caste groups were most visible in the domain of education. The wealthiest families were educating their children in large private schools located in the market areas outside the village. Each morning, their children would stand outside dressed and ready—ties and slacks for the boys and sweaters and skirts for the girls—as they waited for their daily conveyance to and from school. The remaining upper caste families as well as some OBCs were sending their children to the local Saraswati Vidya Mandir, a private school that Mr. Sharma, an educated Brahmin, ran (illegally) inside his home. Among the lower castes, some Dalits (particularly the *Chamars*) were sending their children to a state-assisted private school bearing Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's name. Run by two local high school graduates, the school was held inside a barn. The most disadvantaged families were sending their children to the government primary school, a clear marker of low status.

Social divisions in Pundail were so intense that even private schools were partitioned along caste lines. Upper caste parents were eager to tell me that their children were studying under the tutelage of the village Brahmin. Only a few relatively wealthy Dalits were educating their children at the school. Most of their children attended the Ambedkar private school, which they clearly identified as their own. In a village that took no more than ten minutes to cover by foot, clear geographic lines had been drawn separating the different communities. As one father put it: "*Children from here go to this school, and children from that neighborhood go to that school.*" Meanwhile, there were divisions even among Dalits. The Ambedkar school was attended mostly by the *Chamar* caste, the most dominant Dalit group in western UP. The *Balmikis*, meanwhile, refused to send their children to the "*Chamar school*," instead preferring to send their children to a private school outside the village. Pundail thus had all the trappings of social fragmentation that the literature associates with public apathy and neglect.

Still, it was unclear why the government primary school was hemorrhaging students. First established in 1955, the school had undergone several renovations as part of SSA, including a brand

new school building, two additional classrooms, a kitchen shed and bathrooms, which were completed by 2006. The building had freshly painted walls, running water and working toilets. It even had an entry ramp for disabled children to access the building. The newly built government middle school also had excellent infrastructure, with a large playground and cricket field that was well-protected by a boundary wall. The gram pradhan, who had overseen the renovations at the primary school, credited the local education bureaucracy for providing the Village Education Committee funds and guidelines on how to carry out the building improvements. Yet student enrollment was on the decline. School teachers complained of having to artificially inflate the enrollment registers to fend off criticism from the local education bureaucracy, who came every now and again to conduct inspections.

Though it had vastly superior infrastructure, the quality of teaching at the government primary school was by all accounts abysmal. The absence of learning was evident from the fact that fifth grade students could not complete elementary, double-digit addition problems that I posed to them in class. The school had three teachers—one headmaster along with two para-teachers, who did most of the teaching. It became clear from my visits each day that only the para-teachers engaged in teaching, while the headmaster spent most of his time basking in the sun. On some occasions, he would arrive to the school drunk, barely able to maintain his balance while riding through the village on his bicycle.²⁵⁵ Pundail had a Village Education Committee to address such issues, but like in so many villages across UP, it rarely met. Few parents I interviewed were aware that the committee existed, and those who did know about it anyhow felt the government system was beyond repair. As one parent from the Dalit community explained:

Just look at the condition of the primary school. There is no education happening at all. And people here don't raise their voice. Anyone with means (jugar) has taken the private school option. Our family doesn't have any land and we can't afford the private school fees. We are just sending them [the children] to the government school out of compulsion. Many are sending their children to the Ambedkar school, but even that place is no good. Those with money educate their children in private schools outside of the village. The big contractor who lives back there, he can afford to send his children to private school because he receives government contracts for his work.

Conditions were so bad that many parents chose to send their children to very low quality private schools. Students at the Vidya Mandir school sat on the ground in highly cramped conditions, without even a blackboard to follow the daily lesson. Conditions at the Ambedkar private school were even worse. Children there were sprawled across a barnyard, sitting on strips of cloth (*taat-patti*) thrown on top of hay and manure. With the growth of private school options, there appeared to be little motivation to organize collectively around primary education.

Yet a closer examination of Pundail's history reveals that the onslaught of private schooling was quite a new phenomenon. Prior to that, the village had a history of collective action around education. Well before SSA policies went into effect, most of residents had completed their early childhood education at the local primary school itself, from day laborers to the more highly educated service professionals in the village, including the gram pradhan, Mr. Gupta. The original primary school building was first established in 1955; community members provided their own resources,

²⁵⁵ And that too knowing full well that I was visiting the school as part of a study on primary education. From what I could glean, drinking among government school teachers was apparently common in Saharanpur. Residents I met from several villages across the district reported a similar state of affairs in their primary schools.

including land, labor and funds to build and maintain it. The middle school in Pundail, formally recognized in 2006 under SSA policy, stood next to a much older, now decrepit structure that community members constructed on their own many decades prior. A group of Dalit laborers recounted how the middle school in Pundail first came to be:

*Our middle school has a long story behind it. A Harijan [Dalit] girl from our village had been married off to someone in Muzaffarnagar... She was killed and her family received money from the government on her behalf. They wanted to use the money to build a school in her memory, so everyone in the village came together for that. Some of the more wealthy people [bade log] donated the land for the school, and we [Dalits] helped construct the building... The school started out on a temporary basis, but eventually it caught on. Each family donated some money to hire teachers and maintain the school's upkeep. And like that, the middle school went on for many years in the same building.*²⁵⁶

The middle school in Pundail ran informally for close to two decades, with virtually no governmental input. Problems of aging infrastructure and makeshift teaching arrangements became apparent over time, and community members came together to seek support from the local bureaucracy. To improve the quality of schooling, they needed regular, trained teachers as well as building repairs and improvements. Community members took turns writing letters and visiting the local education bureaucracy in Saharanpur. As the gram pradhan of Pundail recounted:

*For a while the middle school ran without any official recognition, and we saw the problems with this. Students faced difficulties with the teachers being irregular. So people from the village got together and made a big effort in Saharanpur to get regular teachers. But the Education Department could do nothing for us. They told us that the school was unrecognized by the government and it was not their duty to provide teachers. Instead of receiving help we were sent away with a warning. Because the school was running informally we could get in trouble if officers came for inspections.*²⁵⁷

After several unsuccessful attempts to gain support from the local bureaucracy in Saharanpur, efforts to upgrade the middle school lost steam. The school eventually gained official recognition by the state in 2005, and the school building was upgraded under SSA soon thereafter. Even to accomplish that, local residents recalled having to travel as far as Lucknow to demand provision of a new building. Because the original school was unrecognized, and the local bureaucracy did not have any official policy in hand for upgrading previously unrecognized school buildings, officials in Saharanpur were wary to provide new infrastructure without official clearance from Lucknow. By the time any tangible results came out from these collective efforts, families of means in Pundail had already removed their children from the village school system and began sending them to larger, more established government institutions at the district center.

Residents in Pundail had yet another path available to them: democratic institutions. And notwithstanding an otherwise bleak picture, they showed a remarkable capacity to overcome the grip of social fragmentation and divisive caste politics. They voted across caste lines to support Mr. Gupta, an unlikely candidate for gram pradhan. A well-educated lawyer belonging to the tiny Baniya community of Pundail, Mr. Gupta was determined to improve conditions in his village. By contrast,

²⁵⁶ Group discussion with village residents, Pundail, Uttar Pradesh.

²⁵⁷ Interview with panchayat gram pradhan, Pundail, Uttar Pradesh.

the previous pradhan, who belonged to the majority Chamar community, earned a reputation for getting houses built for himself and his close supporters. He also ran a large liquor stand.

Going against the pressure of caste-based voting, many within the Chamar community chose to support Mr. Gupta, as they felt he was a fair man and more qualified to get things done for the village. Their efforts bore fruit, as the Mr. Gupta had new village footpaths built and sewers cleaned up during his first year in office. He also moved to install new bathrooms and hand pumps throughout the village. A resident from the Chamar community expressed the general sentiment towards Mr. Gupta:

As far as pradhans go, the Baniya pradhan is a good guy. The Chamar pradhan wasn't helping anybody except for himself and his immediate family. He didn't do anything for the village. The new pradhan is better educated, and he's done more for the village. He had a brick lane (kharanja) built throughout our hamlet. He also got the sewage lines (nalas) cleaned out, and new bathrooms built.²⁵⁸

Even though the Chamars held a majority of votes in the village, residents across caste groups were keen to point out that they supported the Baniya pradhan because they felt he was better qualified. Mr. Gupta's efforts in improving village sanitation were recognized through an award, the *Rashtriya Nirmal Gram Puruskar*, conferred by India's Total Sanitation Campaign. With the award, Pundail was named a "Clean Village" (*nirmal gram*), one that was free from the scourge of open defecation. Many took pride in the achievement.

When it came to panchayat elections and village infrastructure projects, residents of Pundail showed little sign of public apathy. To the contrary, they took an avid interest in local politics and displayed a high degree of vigilance around the upcoming elections. Yet they also expressed a sense of futility with regards to local democracy. Beyond getting some classrooms renovated, the village panchayat did not appear to have much effect on the quality of primary schooling in Pundail. The notion that "*our vote doesn't count*," was a common refrain during conversations with residents, regardless of caste or socioeconomic position. As one father explained during a group discussion:

Village elections have nothing to do with education. They are about handing out booze and drinking. The public here isn't motivated by things like education. And there's a reason for that. On the one hand the government says "Abolish Poverty" (Garibi Hatao), but then it does nothing to help us get out of it. There is no value to our vote.²⁵⁹

Rather than improving matters, many felt that local elections were a nuisance, as they tended to divide people, promote alcoholism and other social ills. As I observed firsthand during the run up to India's national elections in 2009, party workers from across the political spectrum in Saharanpur would each set up liquor stands in or around villages prior to elections. Women in Pundail were particularly outspoken against the menace of a locally-produced country liquor (*kaccha daru*), which had come to plague the village. There were several ongoing cases of domestic violence in the village, a phenomenon that appeared to be on the rise during election time.

²⁵⁸ Interview with village resident, Pundail.

²⁵⁹ Group discussion with men, Village Pundail.

Perhaps the nature of the public good or service in question is what mattered most. As the literature on social fragmentation suggests, caste divisions tend to hinder collective action around universal public services like education. Village footpaths and toilets, meanwhile, are more like club goods, which can be divided across groups. Moreover, given the social status attached to school choice, perhaps the educational arena was by its very nature too divisive to generate cooperation across social groups. Yet the history behind the middle school shows that residents in Pundail possessed the capacity to engage in collective action around education. Contrary to what the literature on social fragmentation might suggest, even in the face of intense caste divisions, public apathy was not the natural order of things.

Residents in Pundail continued to organize collectively around education during my fieldwork. It had become apparent that students at the middle school were unable to compete with their private school peers in critical subjects like math and science. Since neither of the two teachers allotted under SSA had the appropriate educational background to teach these subjects, a group of parents came together to draft a proposal to the local bureaucracy requesting additional teachers. Sitting alongside a group of residents, Mr. Gupta recounted their collective efforts:

For some time we only had one teacher. After we made countless demands, they transferred one additional teacher to the school. We sent further requests to the Basic Shiksha Adhikaari [District Education Officer] for math and science teachers. In fact, I personally wrote letters to officials from the District Magistrate all the way up to the Education Minister... They told us that there is no policy to guarantee math and science teachers... By now they have stopped responding to our letters. If you ask me, there is no will to implement education policies in a way that truly benefits people. The Department just wants to show that World Bank funds are being properly utilized.²⁶⁰

The move to obtain additional teachers at the middle school was still underway in Pundail during the course of fieldwork. Even parents sending their children to private schools were involved in the effort. Many I interviewed lamented having to spend money to send their children to private schools when a perfectly fine government school with brand new infrastructure and trained staff was just a stone's throw away from their homes. While some felt that collective action to press the state could still be worth a try, their expectations were dampened. During interviews with a local official who conducted school inspections in Pundail, I learned about the challenges she faced in responding to local needs:

The children in Pundail really want to study. During my school visits, they will often say to me, 'Please send us a mathematics teacher!' But there is no special provision for that, and I cannot make an accommodation for just one school... It was hard enough just getting their middle school fully recognized after it ran informally for so long.²⁶¹

Unable to make an exception for Pundail, she felt it was only a matter of time before the wealthier families exited the system. Still, disadvantaged residents continued to come together again to improve conditions at the primary school. Pundail had an active women's association that participated in literacy campaigns and worked to advance girls' education. Organized in the early 1990s by a local NGO, the association had twenty members, most of who belonged to the poorest Dalit households in the village. Well before SSA policies were enacted by the state, the group took

²⁶⁰ Interview with panchayat gram pradhan, Pundail, Uttar Pradesh.

²⁶¹ Local education official, Saharanpur District, Uttar Pradesh.

on numerous barriers to education within their community. For example, they helped organize residents to abolish the illegal fees that school headmasters would charge during the annual exam period.

With the arrival of SSA policies, the women's association in Pundail took a renewed interest in monitoring primary schooling. Members of the group would take turns visiting the primary school to check whether school teachers had arrived on time. They would also monitor the Midday Meal Program, checking to see that the food was healthy and nutritious before it was served to the children. In light of their previous interest and involvement at the primary school, the women's association was given the opportunity to manage the Midday Meal as part of the Mahila Samakhya program. Two members from the group would visit the school each day to cook and administer the meal, which gave them ample opportunity to observe the school headmaster's behavior. Yet their ability to address critical problems facing the primary school, particularly poor teaching quality and student retention was limited. As the head of the women's association recounted:

The education at the primary school is nil. The headmaster shows up drunk. Sometimes he even drinks at the school. You can see for yourself...He keeps a panwa [quarter-measure] with him in his office. Our group tried to get him to understand that this is wrong. Eventually, we got fed up. We locked the gate of the school one morning until he agreed to stop. But instead, he threatened to call the Education Department and have our cooks removed from the Midday Meal.²⁶²

Underlying these difficulties were prevailing norms of casteism. In a pattern similar to other cases I observed across UP, non-Dalits in Pundail were not pleased to learn that the women's group was involved with managing the Midday Meal. Many families I interviewed felt it was an affront to village caste norms. A father from the *Nai* (barber) community, whose children were attending private school, engaged me in a conversation about local customs:

Father: Kids belonging to higher castes would obviously not like the food cooked by those women...Look, you are a Baniya. Now you tell me, would you eat food made from the hands of a Chamar? Would you drink their water?

Me: Well, things are very different now, especially in the cities...

Father: Yes times are changing in cities, but in the village these traditions still matter.

Facing the insults of upper caste school teachers and families head on, the women's association continued to administer the Midday Meal. They even used their precious group savings to finance the meal for the first two months, purchasing food grains and fuel, and paying the cook's monthly salary. Delays in reimbursement were common a problem with the Midday Meal program; several school teachers I interviewed complained of having to cover the first month or two of the program from their own pockets. However, unlike government school teachers, the women did not enjoy a public salary to keep them afloat. Seeing their hard earned group savings fast diminishing, they decided to visit the local education bureaucracy in Saharanpur to request that payment be expedited. They would have to wait to receive funds, they were told, just like everyone else. These experiences reminded them that the local state was not working on their behalf.

What options were left for the disadvantaged in Pundail? According to officials in the local education bureaucracy, parents had the recourse to file a formal complaint against school teachers

²⁶² Interview with women's association head, Pundail.

who were not performing their duties. The complaint system allowed either a guardian of a child or village official to file a written order against a teacher, after which an investigation would be launched by the local administration. Yet rarely did they find parents using the system, except on occasion for the most egregious circumstances, such as cases of sexual abuse. As one of the officials explained:

I get calls all the time that teachers are coming late or not showing up...the teachers here are fully into politics. But we have a complaint system in place for matters like these. Of course if we see something wrong happening we can act on the teacher right there and then. But if the parents are not going to speak up, then how can we take action against someone? The parents have to take some interest first. They have to come forward and take responsibility.²⁶³

For these officials, the failure of parents to “take responsibility” was reflected in their not utilizing the complaint system the state had in place for them. Meanwhile, for the parents belonging to the Dalit community in Pundail, the idea of going ahead with a formal complaint against the primary school headmaster was practically a nonstarter. By and large, parents expressed a sense of fear over what might happen if they did file a complaint. Some were hesitant to speak out about the headmaster in public, as they believed their children might endure the brunt of his reaction later, through mistreatment in class or even physical abuse. Moreover, they explained to me, when educated, upper caste residents led by the gram pradhan—a man who in this case was a legal advocate and familiar with the administrative system—could not overcome bureaucratic hurdles in the past, then what could they as illiterates expect to accomplish now?

Neither did Dalit parents see democratic politics as a viable mechanism for pressing the local education bureaucracy to act against the headmaster. Some called attention to the fact that they had an active BSP party worker living among them in the village, whose daughter also happened to be enrolled in the government primary school. Yet even he was unwilling to file a formal complaint or pursue the matter through his political network. As a pair of sisters in the village joked, “*He says ‘Bhenji, Bhenji’ all the time...but what has his Bhenji been able to do about it? Nothing at all!*”²⁶⁴

Although many Dalit residents of Pundail felt that Mayawati’s political ascendance provided them degree of recognition (*pahchan*) within India’s political space,²⁶⁵ few expressed the belief that the BSP was working to improve the quality of public goods and services within their village. Some pointed to changes happening outside the village, such as the establishment of a new police precinct in the market center nearby and a secondary school for girls bearing Mayawati’s name. Yet beyond the school’s symbolic value, most Dalit parents in Pundail felt that their children would not likely benefit from the school. Still others pointed out that Mayawati was dealing with the same unequal structure (*dhancha*) inside the state that they had to face in Pundail.

The case of Pundail provides a grounded view of the social and political realities facing local public agencies. It also calls attention to the gross mismatch between the norms governing those agencies and the task of implementing universal primary education. The mechanisms behind the persistence of school dysfunction in Pundail can be traced back to the interaction between

²⁶³ Interview with local official, Department of Education, Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh.

²⁶⁴ “*Bhenji*,” meaning “sister” in Hindi, is the popular name given to Mayawati by her supporters in Uttar Pradesh.

²⁶⁵ As one Dalit father expressed to me over a conversation, “*Now it feels like we are also someone [of worth] here...this space is also for us.*”

entrenched social inequality and the local education bureaucracy's legalist approach to implementation. Even after several significant bouts of local collective action, the bureaucracy was unable to adapt policies to meet the needs of Pundail's Dalit families. In carrying out a strict interpretation of the rules, local bureaucrats effectively dampened their collective voice. As one member of the women's group put it to me, "*The [Education] Department just doesn't recognize us. We have no standing in their eyes.*"

A cynical reading of the events that unfolded in Pundail might suggest that public officials were indifferent to the needs of marginalized communities. Yet the findings presented based on participant with the local education bureaucracy in Saharanpur, presented throughout this chapter, demonstrated quite the opposite. A more likely explanation is based on the governing the local education bureaucracy, which promote strict rule following, discouraging officials from attempting anything beyond that. The same local official who could not provide a math teacher for the school in Pundail shared her experiences of trying to work outside the rules, particularly alongside school teachers:

In my last posting, I took the most good-for-nothing (nalayak) teachers and tried to motivate them...the ones who are most influenced by local politics in Puvarka [administrative block]. I worked with them, and through them we helped improve their schools. And we got the best work done together. But for this the Department showed no appreciation. This kind of work doesn't carry any value. What matters are the official duties, the physical school building register, the attendance register, and following the process for SSA. But this other work is just seen as 'extra' and we get no recognition for doing it.²⁶⁶

The same official went on to describe the scant emphasis her office placed on the "quality" aspect of universal primary education, and the risk that, with the growth of privatization, the poorest students would not be able to keep pace with their peers. She then recalled how recently the official target provided by the SSA State Project Office for school distance had been changed from 2 km distance to 1 km: "*I would say that this is a good step. The problem is that now the school is built in front of his house and kid isn't going. And we are not able to face that fact.*" While we should not expect every local official in UP to display the same degree of initiative as this one, bureaucratic norms are unlikely to help advance such initiative.

7. Alternative Explanations

The findings above demonstrate that bureaucratic norms governing public agencies in Uttar Pradesh have contributed to the poor yet mixed performance of the state in implementing universal primary education. To complete the analysis, however, we must account for additional factors that can explain the poor, though somewhat mixed, outcomes for policy implementation in UP. As I mentioned at the start of the chapter, there are variety of explanations that can account for poor implementation in UP, which make it a least-likely case for our analysis. However, some of these explanations face a difficult time accounting for the changes that have taken place in UP, especially in the area of school infrastructure development.

²⁶⁶ Interview with local education official, Saharanpur District.

Perhaps the most obvious explanation for UP's poor performance in education is its low levels of income and relatively slow economic growth. Similarly, poverty has persisted at a much higher rate in UP compared to the rest of India. Yet it is important to recognize that UP was not always among the poorest states in India. As Kohli (2012) notes, UP's economic performance during the colonial period was about average and the economy continued to perform respectably up until the 1990s, after which time investment declined considerably. While we cannot dismiss the importance of economic development, the fact that several Indian states, many of which were historically poorer than UP, have moved ahead in terms of social indicators, suggests the limits of the economic explanations for poor governance (Drèze and Sen 2002).

Another plausible explanation for poor implementation in UP has to do with its historical institutions, in particular the institution of *zamindari*. *Zamindari* is a system of revenue collection imposed by the British, which gave upper caste landlords (the *zamindars*) full authority to impose taxes on cultivators and landless peasants. Although the stronghold of upper castes in UP broke down considerably in the decades following Independence, especially with the rise of middle caste farmers who benefitted from India's Green Revolution policies, *zamindari* continued to form the basis for highly exploitative economic relations well after the institution was abolished, giving rise to social conflicts whose impact continues to be felt today.²⁶⁷ Some find that districts that experienced *zamindari* under British rule have continued to show lower levels of public goods provision several decades later, as recently as the 1990s (Banerjee, Iyer et al. 2005).²⁶⁸ However, the historical inequality in public goods access has also declined considerably over the last few decades, suggesting that history does not fully dictate the future (Banerjee and Somanathan 2007). Although it would be a mistake to discount the pernicious effects of *zamindari*, particularly in exploiting lower caste groups abetting social conflict in rural UP, it cannot account for the abysmal quality of education today. With the mobilization of lower caste across the state, the political changes in UP have been nothing short of remarkable.

Others argue that the divisive nature of caste politics in UP led the state to underinvest in social policies like education and health, and that underinvestment explains UP's lagging educational performance (Drèze and Gazdar 1996). There is no denying that UP's low investment in areas like education and health have contributed to the state's woeful record of social development. However, given the increasing role of India's central government in the sphere of primary education, the resources and policies made available to UP have exceeded what the state has been able to utilize effectively.²⁶⁹ Still, the observation that divisive caste politics has led to weak political support for education is important to bear in mind. Even with the mobilization of traditionalized marginalized voters, none of the political parties in UP have taken up education as a public issue (Pai 2002; Mehrotra 2006).

²⁶⁷ Although *zamindari* was abolished immediately after Independence, upper castes landlords continued to wield significant authority at the local level. Maintaining the support of landed elites was the dominant political strategy for Congress and other political parties in UP, which in turn, contributed to poor implementation of land reforms, further reifying their local control (Kohli 1987).

²⁶⁸ At the same time, the study also finds a high degree of convergence across Indian districts in the provision of public good.

²⁶⁹ Starting with the World's Bank's UP Basic Primary Education Program (UPBEP) back in the early 1990s, UP has been the recipient of relatively generous external and central government programs. As Kingdon and Muzammil (2009) note, the problems of equity and efficiency in policy implementation far exceeds the problem of financing.

Insofar as the UP state lacks the political will to see universal primary education implemented, the education bureaucracy may be irrelevant. Yet the political will argument raises the further puzzle of why UP has been relatively effective in expanding primary school infrastructure, and that too in accordance with the requirements of India's Right to Education Act. Without some role for the bureaucracy, the remarkable growth in access to primary schooling would be hard to imagine. That said, the failure of UP's education bureaucracy to achieve anything beyond improved access may well have political roots. Moreover, as I showed in the case of infrastructure expansion, in the case of policies that have been proposed by UP's political class, such as the Ambedkar Village Scheme, the bureaucracy can still exert influence over implementation.

The alternative explanations analyzed here help us understand why education remains within UP remains so stubbornly difficult to implement. They do not, however, fully account for when and how positive outcomes emerge. To understand policy implementation within UP, we must factor in the bureaucracy. Yet one may still question whether the outcomes observed within the UP context can be explained by norms within the bureaucracy, or perhaps the norms are themselves part and parcel of a political system that undermines the quality of service delivery. Could a bureaucracy governed by a different set of norms produce better results in UP? I take up this question in the next section, where I explore the case of Mahila Samakhya, an agency that offers an alternative model for policy implementation. Although the lessons from this case study remain tentative, they can point to the bureaucratic paths through which educational service delivery can effectively reach even the most marginalized communities within UP.

5.8. Mahila Samakhya: Exploring an Alternative Model

The cases we examined previously show how legalism in UP's education bureaucracy shapes implementation. The analysis so far leaves open the question of what an alternative path for bureaucratic agencies within UP might look like in practice and achieve. Could public agencies governed by a different set of bureaucratic norms generate better outcomes for the delivery of educational services within UP? I probe this question through the case of Mahila Samakhya's KGBV program. As I discussed earlier in the chapter, the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalay (KGBV) program is an initiative under the central government's SSA policy to provide alternative, residential schooling for girls from disadvantaged backgrounds who have dropped of the regular school system. Within UP, Mahila Samakhya manages 33 KGBV schools, while most of the remaining 746 KGBV schools are run by the state.

5.8.1. An Island of Deliberation: Mahila Samakhya's KGBV School Program

Mahila Samakhya's KGBV school program has gained wide praise from the local press and India's central government.²⁷⁰ The program has been exceptionally well-implemented, with student enrollment up to full capacity, high rates of completion, and strong quality indicators. This is a remarkable achievement given that the girls come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. In

²⁷⁰ See, for example: "Full marks for changing lives," <http://infochangeindia.org/education/stories-of-change/full-marks-for-changing-lives.html>.

participants observation conducted in four KGBV schools located in three districts across UP (Mathura, Saharanpur and Sitapur), I found well-managed, highly-functioning residential learning environments. As a participant observer, I found the students confident and highly engaged, and the residential teachers and staff worked with dedication.²⁷¹ Interviews and focus group discussions with parents also revealed a rate of satisfaction among families. In its recommendations to the central government regarding the KGBV program, a consortium headed by India's preeminent educationists declared "*There is a need to adopt the gender sensitive approach of Mahila Samakhyas to the KGBV schools.*"²⁷²

What has not been examined as closely is the norms governing Mahila Samakhyas in the first place, which helped produce the "gender sensitive" approach to its KGBV program. As I show here, the outcomes associated with the program can be traced back to the norms that guide action within the agency and shape its relations with parents and local communities outside the agency. Earlier in the chapter, I explained how Mahila Samakhyas operates very differently from the rest of the education bureaucracy in UP. The norms governing Mahila Samakhyas are deliberative—they encourage participation, discussion and collective problem-solving across the organizational hierarchy. The organization's staff is encouraged to adapt rules, policies and procedures to meet situations on the ground: "*We are constantly planning, revising and adapting, so our work stays engaged with the field...and in the field, new challenges keep coming.*" While Mahila Samakhyas's State Project Office in Lucknow offers broad policy and managerial guidance, district offices are given the flexibility to adjust strategies according to varying local needs and contexts across UP. The organization also promotes constant, upward communication and feedback.

The norms governing the internal operations of Mahila Samakhyas in turn shape how it relates with marginalized communities, and in particular, its network of more than 4,300 women's groups. Women's empowerment occupies the core of Mahila Samakhyas's work at the village-level. However, field staff do not dictate what empowerment has to mean in practice. As a former State Project Director explained to me:

*When we would first go into community, we would have no agenda. We would just try to understand the system within the community. If we started talking about 'gender,' 'education' and 'rights' they would throw us back out...So we would go there and try to understand the community and its needs first. Suppose they were facing a water crisis, we would 'enter' through water crisis needs...But each area has its own needs...In Chitrakoot there's a water crisis. In Bharaich the problem is flood management.*²⁷³

The same kind of flexibility that is built into the program's community entry strategies continues later on, well after groups women's groups have been formed. Official policy laid out in the Mahila Samakhyas program calls for the women's groups to organize into "core teams" around each of four activity areas—education, health, panchayat, and law. In practice, these program areas are interpreted broadly and are adapted to suit the context within each region and village. At the regional level, for example, the "law" teams in Saharanpur tend to focus on issues of alcoholism and

²⁷¹ As a participant-observer in each of the four KGBV schools, I engaged with the students directly, leading classes on English as well as activity sessions on self-defense and north-Indian classical music.

²⁷² "National Consortium on Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalay: A Visionary Initiative", *Department of Women's Studies*, National Council of Education Research and Training, August 11-12, 2008.

²⁷³ Interview with former State Project Director, Mahila Samakhyas, Uttar Pradesh.

domestic violence and operate an informal women's court (*nari adalat*) that hears cases at fixed intervals and makes collective decisions. The "law" teams in Mathura, meanwhile, focus on issues of child marriage and try responding to cases as they arise on the field through various forms of persuasion.

Perhaps the best evidence for the existence of deliberative norms within Mahila Samakhya comes from the manner in which meetings are held and decisions are reached. In sharp contrast to the routine dismissal of questions and upward communication in UP's education bureaucracy, Mahila Samakhya's field staff is encouraged to speak up, share ground-level experiences and interrogate existing policies. In most of the meetings I have attended across the state, local staff would sit together on the floor in a circle, regardless of official position or rank. After the introduction of the meeting agenda by a senior staff member, they would each take turns sharing their experiences from the field, highlighting the program areas that were working, and questioning the one's they felt were not. The meeting arrangement was no different when senior staff from Lucknow would come and visit a local office. Nor was it any different when local staff would hold meetings with the women's groups in a village. Although in villages, hierarchical arrangements can be stark—few women's groups would permit me to sit on the floor with them, unless I insisted—the challenge, norms *inside* the organization encourage two-way conversation between community members and field staff *outside* the organization.

Before going any further, it is important to underscore the *content* of deliberation. After all, the norms governing Mahila Samakhya do not encourage just *any* kind of exchange, let alone a "value-neutral" transfer of "information." Rather, the content of deliberation explicitly promotes the interrogation of and resistance to traditional forms of power and discrimination, which in rural UP include patriarchy, casteism and economic inequality. Discussion between field staff and community members, while initially centered on seemingly harmless and encompassing issues of "need," such as water, slowly but surely inch their way towards issues of intense social conflict—child marriage, domestic violence and untouchability. Importantly, the women's groups in Mahila Samakhya are not conceptualized in the same way as the standard 'Self Help Groups' promoted by the UP government, which possess a narrow objective of group savings. Rather, they are understood as "*pressure groups*," collectivities of countervailing power and resistance.

At the village-level, mahila Samakhya field workers tied the issue of women's literacy to the real social and economic concerns facing disadvantaged women, from exploitative agricultural wages to domestic violence. Literacy centers (*mahila saksharta kendra*) provided mothers (and their daughters) the opportunity to leave the restrictive confines of the home and discuss in a group their most salient concerns, which would often involve state policies around issues like local water supply, childcare and education. These meeting spaces were also used to discuss primary schooling, provisions like scholarships and free uniforms, participating in student enrollment campaigns and working to ensure that girls in the village attended school.

In that way, it is critical to distinguish between deliberative norms as they operate in Mahila Samakhya and formal decentralization. Insofar as formal organization goes, both the education bureaucracy of UP and Mahila Samakhya are decentralized. In fact, one may even consider the education bureaucracy to be even *more* decentralized—it has formally-recognized Village Education Committees within each school and operates through the democratically-elected village panchayat system. However, it is the *informal* processes and content of exchange among and across levels of organizational hierarchy that distinguish deliberation from decentralization. Within the education

bureaucracy, as we saw earlier, the content of exchange is quite tapered indeed, reflecting a narrow, legalistic interpretation of rules, procedures and policies. District officials provide the state office in Lucknow *information* about the Midday Meal program, but hardly discuss the local conditions and conflicts surrounding that information. Within Mahila Samakhya, meanwhile, local staff cannot but engage with broader issues of geography, gender and caste when discussing the Midday Meal program with their senior colleagues.

The deliberative norms that guide Mahila Samakhya have helped the organization achieve positive outcomes in the KGBV program. Consider first the task of student enrollment. Getting adolescent girls from marginalized communities who have dropped out from the formal school system to re-join a residential school is among the most difficult tasks within education. They or their families may have had unpleasant experiences with the formal school system, and they may have little confidence placing their children in the hands of public agencies. Furthermore, the reasons for girls not participating in the formal school system can vary across local contexts, making it more difficult for agencies to identify effective strategies that can be applied universally.

By discussing issues with parents and local community members, Mahila Samakhya's local staff was able to tailor school enrollment strategies to address varying local conditions. For example, in one of the KGBV schools in Saharanpur District, local staff identified ways to address the special concerns facing families belonging to the area's conservative Muslim community. Parents in many instances had removed their daughters from the formal school after reaching a certain age as they believed it might infringe on their practice of religion. Field staff in that district identified the need to interact with male members of the household first and underscore the freedom the girls would enjoy to practice their religion in school. They also highlighted the school's offering of Urdu language as an elective subject, which parents found attractive. In some cases, they would even send female staff members who were Muslim to visit the families and serve as role models of educational achievement.

Meanwhile, Mahila Samakhya field staff in District Mathura faced a very different set of sociocultural conditions. There, the reason for girls dropping had less to do with religious practices and more squarely to do with economic inequalities associated with gender. A persistent problem affecting the education of disadvantaged girls in the area was the high incidence of "*double marriage*" cases. Double marriage is an illegal practice in which families marry both their daughters off at once. It provides a way for families to save money on costs associated with the marriage ceremony and payment of dowry, another illegal practice that remains widespread. The younger of the two daughters, who may be too young to even realize she is being married off, is compelled into the marital arrangement that requires her to give up schooling.

The Mahila Samakhya field staff and KGBV principal described how their enrollment efforts required a series of targeted interventions, which involved explaining to parents the illegality of the practice. During a particularly egregious case in which a twelve year old girl was being married off to a middle-aged man, the field staff threatened to lodge a complaint against the girls' relatives with the local police until they agreed to cancel the wedding. The ability for field staff to adapt strategies to these varying local contexts has enabled the schools to achieve full enrollment.

Mahila Samakhya's KGBV program also provided flexibility to adapt rules and processes inside the schools themselves. The ability to adjust the program to the needs facing rural girls and their families helped raise parental participation and reduce the odds that students would drop out.

As an example, to facilitate greater parental engagement, the KGBV schools in Sitapur District changed their weekly holiday from Sunday to Monday, which is the day that the local market is open. That way, parents could make a stop to the market on the same day they came to visit their daughters, thereby saving an additional journey from their villages and increasing the likelihood that they could interact with their children and the school's staff. In the words of the school principal: "*We bring the community to the KGBV.*"²⁷⁴ According to parents, small changes in policies like this went a long way to strengthen their confidence in program and the education their daughters were receiving. What were seen as sacrifices on the part of the KGBV staff raised their willingness to make financial contributions and assist the school in other ways.

While breaking with rules like the official weekly holiday appear rather mundane, adjustments like that are rare in the standard education system. In other cases, policy adaptation implied a major break from official rules. In one KGBV school, the students recounted how they wanted to learn math and science but did not have any teachers available for those subjects. The district staff took an alternative approach:

*We wanted to have all female teachers, but our girls demanded subjects like science and math, and often we can't find any. Especially in the most educationally backward neighborhoods, it can be hard. The warden running the school has to be a woman, but in some schools we have accepted male teachers, though the place of residence for them has to be different.*²⁷⁵

In light of the value the girls and their families placed on subjects like math and science, Mahila Samakhya staff carried out a major break from policy. The standard KGBV program run by UP's education bureaucracy face an acute shortage of math and science teachers for the very reason that they are unable to find female teachers. The flexibility built into the Mahila Samakhya program, meanwhile, enabled their district staff to find a compromise that satisfied the needs and desires of the students and their families.

Last but not least, consider how the norms governing Mahila Samakhya influence the quality of teaching itself. Officially speaking, policies for recruitment of school teachers for the KGBV program managed by Mahila Samakhya are no different from that of the education bureaucracy. They involve an "aptitude" component that include one's academic qualifications as well as a somewhat vague component on "gender." Within the education bureaucracy, "gender" has been interpreted narrowly to mean "female." And to its credit, the state has gone to great lengths to ensure the recruitment of women within the KGBV program. Meanwhile, in Mahila Samakhya's KGBV program, "gender" is interpreted in more capacious terms to include gender sensitivity and an awareness of gender inequalities, which the local district staff assess informally during interviews.

After the recruitment phase, teachers in the Mahila Samakhya KGBV program go through training cycles. Mahila Samakhya officials refer to these as "*de-learning*," or learning to discard the standard, "top-down" methods of dictation that characterize teaching across much of India. It is during these training sessions that new teachers come to experience the organizational practices within Mahila Samakhya, particularly the strategies of community and gender empowerment and the forms of upward communication, deliberation, and listening, across the organization. For school teachers at the KGBV program, beyond the subject matter itself, it is the participatory approach to

²⁷⁴ Interview with School Principal, KGBV School, Mahila Samakhya, District Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh.

²⁷⁵ Focus group discussion with teaching staff, KGBV School, Uttar Pradesh.

teaching, which involves listening, instilling confidence in the girls, and helping them find their own “*awaaz*” (voice), that has helped transform the girls, both in the classroom and outside.

5.8.2 Enabling Factors

The analysis above would be incomplete without consider additional factors that may have enabled Mahila Samakhya’s KGBV program to be so effective. Consider first the role of formal incentives and organizational structures. Unlike the education bureaucracy of UP, Mahila Samakhya staff (both state and local) do not enjoy civil service protection and are on significantly lower pay scales than regular government employees. These incentive differences may, in turn, account for variation in behavior. While it would be a mistake to deny the importance of incentives, there is good reason to think that incentives alone do account for the variation across public agencies in India. Public agencies facing with the same formal incentives structures operate very differently, which suggests that incentives within the state, while important, are insufficient for explaining variation in bureaucratic behavior.

Second, the overwhelming majority of *non*-state agencies working in education across UP offer nothing close to the pay scales or civil service protections available to public employees, and yet they too vary significantly in quality. Many employees at Mahila Samakhya would describe the differences they experienced working in other organizations. As an experienced member of the field staff from Sitapur put it: “Other NGOs I’ve worked with do not focus as much on process. Here I find an *apnapan* [we-ness] in the way we do things.”²⁷⁶ From the reports available on KGBV schools managed by NGOs in UP, there is no evidence to suggest that they perform better than the one’s managed by the state. This raises important research questions around the conditions underlying organizational performance and the quality of service delivery across *both* public and nongovernmental agencies.

A second factor relates to Mahila Samakhya’s organizational autonomy and human resource practices. As a mission-driven agency that operated outside of the legalistic stranglehold of the state, Mahila Samakhya enjoyed the flexibility to recruit and train employees in novel ways. Hiring procedures were based not only on merit, but an interview process that gauged the commitment and experience candidates had working in the field of gender and women’s rights. Beyond employee selection, the process of training employees to participate in decision-making was also critical.

To identify effective ways to adapt policies on the ground, employees had to learn first how to engage in deliberation and joint problem-solving. These were practical skills that many had come across for the very first time. Here it helps to consider the experiences of employees when they first joined Mahila Samakhya. The field staff at Mahila Samakhya shared their experiences of having to “*adjust*” to the way things were done in the organization. Many recalled having to develop new “*habits of speaking*” (*bolne ki aadat*) during meetings, which they little experience doing prior to joining the organization. These habits developed over time in tandem with the “*de-learning*” of traditional methods and habits.

A third factor relates to leadership quality and skills. As with other public agencies, UP’s education bureaucracy was led by senior IAS officers who were trained as generalists that could

²⁷⁶ Interview with local field staff, Mahila Samakhya, District Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh.

rotate across functional divisions of the state. Meanwhile, the State Project Director for Mahila Samakhya was staffed by someone with commitment to its mission and specialized skills to carry it out. It is hard to downplay the importance of these leadership skills, especially given the social forces acting against gender equality and universal primary education in UP. Mahila Samakhya's local staff would often point to the leadership and example set by state-level officers, whose commitment helped carry them through daily struggles in the field. In the traditional education bureaucracy, meanwhile, top posts such as Education Secretary and State Project Director for SSA in UP changed very frequently due to reassignment. Over the course of my fieldwork, the officers in these top positions changed every six months. Leadership instability within the state is a daunting challenge, though one that is not unique to UP's education bureaucracy. It is a problem across India, even in high-performing states like Himachal Pradesh.

The observation that leadership can matter does not necessarily challenge the significance of bureaucratic norms. Insofar as subordinates turn to leaders for cues on how to behave, leadership may well be a mechanism driving the transmission of norms within an organization. At the same time, however, for bureaucratic norms to carry the causal weight I accord them, they ought to persist irrespective of the individual personalities of those in charge. And on that point, I can offer two pieces of evidence. First, out of last four State Project Directors to lead Mahila Samakhya, two were public officials selected from within the education bureaucracy. One of them was a senior IAS officer who at one time was also Education Secretary of UP.

According to Mahila Samakhya's local staff, the alternation of leadership between public officials and individuals from outside did bring some corresponding changes in the agency's focus, though significant changes in organizational processes. While they found that leaders from within the education bureaucracy tended to apply rules and procedures more rigidly, district offices continued to enjoy flexibility in carrying out their duties. Second, I had the opportunity to observe the impact of leadership change within Mahila Samakhya as an alternation took place over the course of my fieldwork. Although local staff reported differences in the leadership style of the new head, they experienced little variation in how they carried out their work. Having said that, we cannot rule out that leadership change may affect organizational norms and processes, especially since as the impact may face a lag. In that case, it may just be a matter of time before more durable changes in Mahila Samakhya begin to appear.

9. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to explain UP's poor yet mixed performance in implementing primary education policies through the lens of legalistic norms. As I have tried to show, bureaucrats guided by legalistic norms adhere strictly to official rules and procedures, shield the state from local demands and marginalize civil society participation, which produces inferior outcomes for policy implementation. Legalism makes it difficult for the state to address in particular the distinct needs facing marginalized communities that depend on the government school system.

At the same time, the findings also showed that legalism can, within certain limits, produce positive outcomes for school infrastructure development. In a setting where caste politics runs rife, the strict adherence to rules and procedures allow local officials to work around particularistic policies like the Ambedkar Village Scheme. Contrary to our prevailing theories about clientelism

and bureaucratic capture, public agencies based in very different political settings of District Saharanpur and Sitapur developed strategies to maintain authority over school infrastructure development. While they did not achieve complete bureaucratic autonomy, legalism provided some a degree of protection from outright capture. These findings resonate with other ethnographic studies of local bureaucracy in UP, which find that public officials appeal to official rules and procedures as a way to maintain discretion over the implementation process (Gupta 2012).

When it comes to service delivery, however, public agencies in UP were far less capable of addressing the needs facing marginalized communities. While one may suppose that the Midday Meal program and educational services were over-determined to fail given the entrenched social division and inequalities, legalism nevertheless did not provide any mechanisms to mitigate the domination of privileged groups. If anything, the strict adherence to rules and procedures advantaged those who already had access to the official system. Moreover, the case of school dysfunction in Pundail showed that public apathy was not a necessary outcome of social divisions in the village, but the emergent result over a process of interaction between marginalized groups and local public agencies. The attempt to engage in collective action around primary schooling was dampened when these marginalized citizens found that the bureaucracy would not work on their behalf.

These results may lead one to think that there is no possibility that public agencies in UP could operate effectively on behalf of marginalized groups. The case of Mahila Samakhya, however, stood out as an alternative model that offered some promise. In a sea of legalism, Mahila Samakhya's field staff was engaged in deliberation, both across the organizational hierarchy and with the target communities. There are, of course, some important differences between the formal structure of Mahila Samakhya and the education bureaucracy. Yet the norms that helped guide critical processes of hiring, training and collective problem-solving offered some insights for how a deliberative approach within the UP context might work effectively.

The adaptive capacity of Mahila Samakhya was built on a process of de-learning, which effectively meant undoing habits that were inculcated within the traditional school system.²⁷⁷ These same processes operated inside the KGBV schools that Mahila Samakhya has managed so effectively, helping to transform some of the at-risk segments of UP's child population. These findings suggest a relationship between the quality of agencies that deliver education and the quality of education itself. However, we must still contend with the question of why it was that UP's education bureaucracy developed norms that militate against such an adaptive learning process, while norms within HP's education bureaucracy make it far more capable of learning. In other words, what sets a public agency along its normative path? I take up that question in the concluding chapter.

²⁷⁷ A similar observation has been made by Freire (1972).

Chapter 5 – Appendix

Figure 5.1. Uttar Pradesh – Proposed Divisions

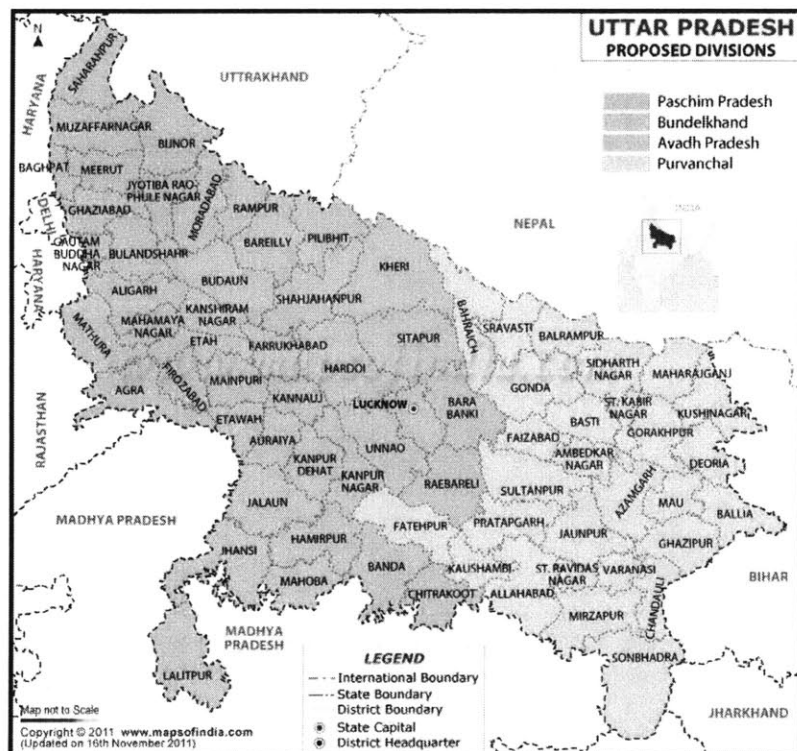
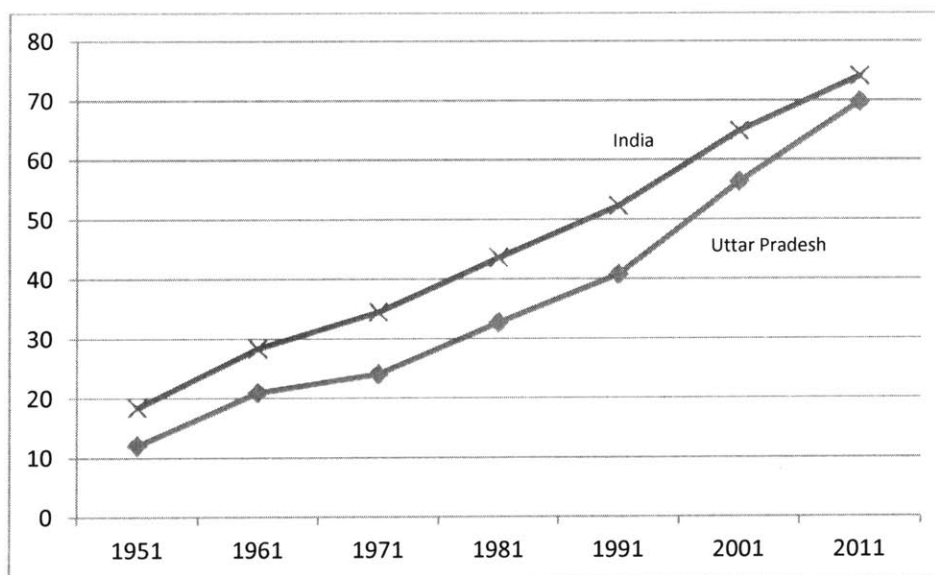


Figure 5.2 Literacy Trend in Uttar Pradesh



Source: Census of India, multiple years.

Table 5.7. District Socioeconomic Indicators

	<i>Saharanpur</i>	<i>Sitapur</i>	<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>
<i>Demographic Indicators[#]</i>			
Population	2,896,863	3,619,661	166,197,921
% Urban	25.8	12	20.8
% Scheduled Caste	21.7	31.9	21.1
% Muslim	39.1	19.2	18.5
<i>Economic Indicators</i>			
Income Per Capita	16575	9494	11477
% Below Poverty Line [*]	24.6	57.5	39
Deprivation Index [^]	37.77	70.55	54.53
<i>Social Indicators[#]</i>			
Literacy Rate	61.2	48.3	56.3
Gender Gap in Literacy	20.9	25.4	26.6
Sex Ratio	868	862	898
Human Development Index [^]	0.6173	0.5143	0.5709

[#] Census of India 2001

^{*} Uttar Pradesh BPL Census 2002

[^]Uttar Pradesh Human Development Report

Chapter 6. Conclusion: Bringing the Bureaucracy Back In

6.1. Introduction

This dissertation analyzed when and how the Indian state implements universal primary education. The overwhelming majority of governments, India included, have enacted laws making primary education universal, free and compulsory. There is widespread *prima facie* agreement, at the international level, among policymakers and everyday citizens that states ought to provide children with a basic education. Many countries declare education a fundamental right. The policy consensus notwithstanding, public institutions across the developing world continue to face significant hurdles in securing these rights on behalf of children. While much existing scholarship in the political economy of development and social welfare has analyzed the conditions under which governments enact and finance social policies, far less attention has been devoted to the problem of implementation. What explains the variation agencies vary in their ability to implement universal primary education? In exploring the above question, this dissertation aims to advance our understanding of the conditions under which public institutions function effectively, especially on behalf of marginalized citizens.

The empirical analysis began with an examination of India's policy framework for primary education and sociopolitical context of implementation. India's large, multiethnic, federal democracy displays significant subnational variation in the implementation of primary education. Public agencies operating under the same national policy framework, democratic institutions and administrative structures, vary remarkably in how well they implement universal primary education. Conventional wisdom has it that policy implementation, particularly in a sector like education, should expand with economic development and processes of modernization. Yet upon closer inspection, we observe significant variation left unexplained by income levels, urbanization and other conventional variables associated with the modernization thesis. The remainder of the dissertation analyzed the variation in policy implementation processes and outcomes across three north Indian states. Based on carefully-selected subnational comparisons and nested case studies, this dissertation developed an explanation for implementation centered on bureaucratic norms, the informal rules that govern public agencies, analyzing the mechanisms that shape bureaucratic behavior and structure state-society relations on the ground.

This concluding chapter's main objective is to review the findings and discuss the argument's broader theoretical significance and policy implications. The remainder of this chapter goes as follows. Section 6.2 puts the cases together to summarize the main empirical contribution of the dissertation. I then discuss both the innovations and limitations of the research methodology adopted. Section 6.3 engages one particular concern facing the dissertation, which is to establish the causal primacy of the explanatory variable. The central findings of the study, that bureaucratic norms influence the effectiveness of public agencies, raise natural questions regarding the origin of bureaucratic norms. I first consider a plausible alternative explanation based on political culture. I then go on to explore the political foundations of bureaucratic norms. In particular, I examine the role of political leadership across the case study states. Very preliminary evidence suggests that the interaction between political leaders and bureaucrats around the time of state formation, a period when the unwritten rules of the state were yet to be established, may have helped set in motion the bureaucratic norms that we now observe today.

In section 6.4, I discuss the broader relevance and theoretical contribution of the argument advanced in the dissertation. I examine other cases of policy implementation, first within India and then across other country and policy contexts, illustrating how a theory of bureaucratic norms can help illuminate these other cases. The section ends by revisiting the literature on state capacity and development to discuss how the study of bureaucratic norms can advance our understanding of states and their capacity to achieve their objectives. Section 6.5 concludes the chapter with some policy implications that arise out the dissertation.

6.2. Review of Findings and Contribution

When do public agencies effectively implement policies on behalf of marginalized citizens? More specifically, why, operating under the same national policy framework, democratic institutions and formal administrative structures, do some public agencies in India implement universal primary education more effectively than others? The theory advanced in this dissertation draws our attention to the significance of bureaucratic norms, unwritten rules of conduct that guide the behavior of public officials inside the state and structure their relations with citizens and agencies outside the state. In this section I review the main findings of the dissertation, putting the different cases together. I then summarize the methodological contributions of the project, which arise out of the subnational comparative approach combined with a multi-level research design. Finally, I end this section by discussion some important limitations of the dissertation and how the findings can be bolstered in future research.

6.2.1. Empirics: Putting the Cases Together

Our empirical analysis of policy implementation began in the state of Himachal Pradesh, one of the top performers in with respect to primary education. Findings based on a combination of field research methods, including in-depth interviews, participant observation and village ethnography, revealed the presence of deliberative norms within the education bureaucracy of Himachal Pradesh. Notwithstanding the same formal administrative structure and procedures, bureaucrats across the organizational hierarchy learned to work collectively to solve problems and bend official rules. Local bureaucrats in particular enjoyed the support of their seniors, who promoted their participation in decision-making. Norms that drove behavior within Himachal Pradesh also led officials to promote participation from citizens and civic agencies to identify and solve problems on the ground.

We may have thought at first glance that these “deliberative” norms, as I call them were simply a reflection of social norms in the Himalayan region, which encouraged interdependence and cooperation among local communities. However, the comparison with Uttarakhand brought the differences in bureaucratic norms across these otherwise similar states into sharp relief. Notwithstanding remarkably a similar geography, social fabric and a history of collective action, a very different set of norms evolved within the public agencies of Uttarakhand. There, public officials were guided by legalism, clinging firmly to official rules, policies and procedures. Local bureaucrats in Uttarakhand were not prompted by their seniors to solve problems by bending the

rules. Rather, they learned to maintain rules and protect the state from societal groups, the very same kinds of groups that the bureaucracy in Himachal Pradesh actively promoted.

I went on to analyze a series of nested cases of policy implementation in Himachal Pradesh, connecting outcomes like school placement and targeting of marginalized groups with special programs to the participatory behaviors within the bureaucracy. Bureaucrats in HP systematically adapted policies and bent rules, such as hiring contract teachers for the nomadic Gujjars and adapting the school calendar around local geography and climate to promote student attendance. Meanwhile, women's groups like the one in the village Dharmaur learned to work with the state to collectively monitor primary schooling and make private investments in their schools that complement state efforts. By contrast, the education bureaucracy in Uttarakhand, which had the political opportunity to adopt new strategies and attempted to copy the organizational blueprint for coordinating pre-primary education and health, found it difficult to put these ideas into practice. Instead, officials sought to tighten the rules and promote official procedures, such as teacher rationalization and official monitoring. As we saw in the case of Silam Ghat, however, women's groups that were quite active in promoting early child education were effectively disempowered by local officials.

Again, upon inspection one may have thought that the variation was driven by the greater quantity and/or quality of civil society in Himachal Pradesh. Yet the limits of civil society arguments became apparent once again with the comparison with Uttarakhand, where the history of collective institutions such as forest councils and social movements like the Chipko Andolan provided strong evidence for societal capabilities within the hill state. Further, the persistence of legalism within Uttarakhand after its breakup from UP suggests that, if not bureaucratic norms, then at least some enduring behavioral mechanism that operates like norms, continues to shape how public agencies operate. The enduring pattern offers some confidence that what we identified was norms, and not, for instance, a different set of ideas about implementation, which could presumably have been adopted at the time of state formation.

Still, one may question whether there might be a larger political process behind the endurance of legalism in Uttarakhand, which the analysis, based on a cross-section of time, was unable to identify. For example, it may have been that citizens of Uttarakhand developed different kinds of political relations to their elected officials, perhaps more like the clientelistic relations that many suggest obtain in Uttar Pradesh (Chandra 2007). Although we have some reason to believe that is not the case given the very similar party systems across HP and Uttarakhand, it may be that the Congress Party and BJP, while sharing the same formal platforms and programs, informally connect to voters and bureaucrats in different ways across these two states. Nothing short of a systematic field study of clientelism can truly answer that question.

After analyzing policy implementation across the Himalayan region, our analysis shifted to Uttar Pradesh, a very different setting from our previous two cases. The study of Uttar Pradesh helped put the theory of bureaucratic norms to the test once again. An oft-cited case of governance failure, UP offered the least-likely conditions for effective policy implementations, and yet we observed some positive change in terms of school infrastructure development, which was not well accounted for by existing theories. Moreover, unlike the Himalayan region, UP is a setting in which governance is most often associated with criminal activity and "lawlessness" (Hasan 1994). To find, then, that public agencies in UP operate in a legalistic fashion, and that too in ways that were similar to its hill neighbor of Uttarakhand is quite remarkable. Indeed, the only features that Uttarakhand

and UP share is their political and administrative history, which helps establish that what we identified were norms and not just a different organizational blueprint for implementation.

The analysis of implementation in UP revealed that public agencies are not mere victims of capture, but can exert a degree of agency. In the case of the SSA infrastructure development office, autonomy from other units of the state allowed officials to carry out school expansion rather efficiently. At the local-level, we saw that the BSP and other regional parties used particularism to redirect state resources to Ambedkar Villages, which might have been an example of capture. Or if not outright capture, then certainly it involved political interference over the fair and even policy implementation. Local officials worked within the bounds of the Ambedkar Village Scheme and applied rules and procedures to target schools with new infrastructure. In the area of service delivery, however, the results from Uttar Pradesh were far worse, and in some ways, more complicated to analyze.

A history of social divisions and entrenched inequalities made the delivery of Midday Meals and monitoring of primary schools quite challenging for local officials. One could argue that these factors are what dominated the implementation process, and that legalism perhaps had a moderate effect insofar as it made it harder for marginalized communities to demand better services. However, the explanation based on social divisions, and public apathy that is thought to come with it, had a difficult time account for the process observed in the village Pundail, where marginalized groups were active at the school, and against all odds, came together but then broke away from the school when the local bureaucracy did not support them. This case points to the need for more active and sustained engagement by the state on behalf of marginalized groups in UP, something that legalism does not encourage.

Finally, I analyzed the case of Mahila Samakhya's KGBV program, an alternative model of organization that appeared strikingly close to the deliberative model theorized earlier. Unlike the legalistic approach taken by the education bureaucracy, Mahila Samakhya was able to adapt policies according to varying contexts across districts and communities with which it worked. The autonomy Mahila Samakhya enjoyed from the rest of the education bureaucracy was a crucial factor that enabled the organization to evolve along a distinct normative path. Yet the case also leads one to question whether Mahila Samakhya was in some ways over-determined to succeed given the organizational leadership's strong commitment to gender equality, which suffused many of its policies, from hiring new staff to the training of KGBV school teachers. Still, the conventional theories considered in this dissertation, including the role of formal organizational structure, civil society and clientelism cannot account for the observed behaviors and outcomes of implementation associated with them. As with the previous cases, the Mahila Samakhya case raises important questions regarding where norms come from, and whether committed leadership is a necessary antecedent to norm formation.

6.2.2. Methodology: Subnational Comparative Method

To analyze policy implementation, this study employed the subnational comparative method, an approach that has gained much favor in comparative politics.²⁷⁸ Subnational comparative research has the advantage of allowing one to control for a whole host of explanatory factors, which aids in the identification of causal mechanism. In a large, federal democracy such as India's subnational comparison allows one to control for the design of formal political and administrative institutions. However, the subnational comparative methodology employed here was self-conscious in adopting what Locke and Thelen (1995) refer to as "contextualized comparison." The comparison between Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand went beyond standard matched-pair analysis. These contiguous states within the Himalayan region, controlled not only for conventional variables like population, geography, development and social structure. Importantly, the comparison took account of complex sociopolitical processes—norms and practices associated with caste and gender, parental demand for education, and the nature of party politics. These processes refract universal primary education in similar ways across these two states. On the basis of that contextualized approach to subnational comparison, this dissertation was able to identify how, in a region often portrayed as homogeneous, similar types of local communities experienced the local state in such divergent ways.

This dissertation took subnational comparative analysis one step further by employing a multi-level research design. In his anthropology of the state, Migdal (2001) makes a convincing case for a multi-level, process-oriented approach to studying governance. Between the administrative and political nerve centers based in capital cities and the frontline bureaucratic trenches at the bottom of the state hierarchy one finds multiple points of pressure that can impinge on policy implementation. Within the Indian case, the cumulative findings of research on governance and social development suggests the importance of both "top-down" processes within the state alongside "bottom-up" processes from society (Heller 1999; Banerjee, Iyer et al. 2007; Iyer 2010). Yet with only a few exceptions (e.g. Kohli (1990), existing studies of governance in India develop and test theoretical propositions at either the level of the state, ignoring local problems of implementation, or else at the local district and village-level, ignoring the role of state. Consequently, we have little understanding of how implementation actually takes place, how different units of the state relate to one another, and how these units relate to society more broadly.

Through a multi-level design, this dissertation traced the full chain of governance from the state capital where plans are drafted down to the village primary school, where outcomes are produced and recorded. The approach allowed us to establish rigorously that bureaucratic norms do in fact operate across units of the state, and to probe the mechanisms through which they operate by testing their observable implications at various levels. We saw, for example, that legalism in Uttarakhand undermines local collective, even in villages like Silam Ghat that are rich in civic resources. By the same token, we also found that deliberative norms in Himachal Pradesh help facilitate and sustain local collective action, even in the unlikely setting of the village Dharmaur.

²⁷⁸ As I discussed in Chapter 1, the logic behind the subnational comparison has been elucidated by Locke (1995) and Snyder (2001), and the method has been applied fruitfully across number of studies in the comparative politics of Indian democracy and development.

6.2.3. *Limitations*

Methodological innovations notwithstanding, this dissertation faces important limitations as well. Some of these limitations are inherent to small-N research, while others have to do with the particular qualitative methods used. As Sartori (1970) has pointed out, the strong internal validity of concepts and mechanisms derived from carefully-controlled comparisons often comes at the price of external validity. The closely matched contextualized comparison of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand produced natural question regarding the applicability of the findings to other parts of India. How after all can the mechanisms through which bureaucratic norms operate in the Himalayan region obtain to other parts of India? To mitigate the problem of external validity, or as Slater and Ziblatt (2013) more precisely put it, the “transferability” of the mechanisms in my theory, the incorporation of Uttar Pradesh was critical to the research design. However, that does not remove the problem of transferability.

The subnational comparative method allowed us to control for variables and processes that operate within India, in particular federal democracy. It is not obvious that the same results would obtain in non-democratic settings, where citizens do not have the same kinds of electoral mechanisms available for expressing preferences to political leaders. In addition, the selection of cases took explicit account of economic, structural and political features operating at the state and local level within India. The extent to which conditions similar to those in India obtain must be examined on a case-by-case basis before drawing any inferences regarding the impact of bureaucratic norms.

Third, the qualitative methods employed in this study implied a necessary tradeoff between depth and breadth. The use of qualitative interviews, participant observation and village ethnography allowed for triangulation across methods, ensuring the validity of the findings. However, using these methods, the dissertation could not establish broad patterns of behavior based on quantifiable measures of bureaucratic norms. Nor could these methods capture alternative sources of variation in the quality of the bureaucratic organizations studied. These factors may include, for example, the average age, gender and formal education and training of bureaucrats. Some of this is mitigated by the fact that senior bureaucrats at the IAS level are recruited nationally according to merit-based procedures, trained at same national academy and then assigned to states according to need. The same goes for lower-level bureaucrats, who are hired through similar, merit-based procedures conducted by state public service commissions. Still, even if procedures are followed perfectly, there can be unobserved differences in quality. For example, some bureaucracies may recruit better individuals and train them more effectively than others.²⁷⁹ I plan to address this limitation in future research by conducting a survey of bureaucrats across these states.

Finally, one must be careful not to misconstrue or overstate the impact of bureaucratic norms on education outcomes. The results of this study are drawn from India, which remains at an early stage of educational development in comparison to many other developing countries. Even with recent policy efforts in place, India continues to fall on the very low end of global performance

²⁷⁹ That observation does not necessarily conflict with the explanation centered on informal bureaucratic norms. It may be the case that bureaucratic norms shape the effectiveness of recruitment and training procedures.

for student learning outcomes.²⁸⁰ Insofar as gains in education take place non-linearly, then the same mechanisms for implementation can have varying magnitudes of impact over outcomes depending on where a country falls along the performance frontier.²⁸¹ It may be that the impact of bureaucratic norms is relatively high at the lower range of performance, where India currently lies but then attenuates at higher levels of performance. In short, one cannot generalize indiscriminately the mechanisms of a theory of policy implementation drawn from one context to other cases without first taking careful note of where the cases fall along the (in this instance educational) development trajectory, both in historical and comparative terms. This last point is a limitation common to most single-time and single-country studies in the political economy of development, though again, it is somewhat attenuated here given the wide range of variation in outcomes for the cases analyzed within India.

6.3. The Political Origins of Bureaucratic Norms

The findings of this dissertation provoke the question: what explains the variation in bureaucratic norms across public agencies? Perhaps there is another variable that can explain the variation in bureaucratic norms observed across states and account for outcomes associated with policy implementation. Here I analyze the one plausible explanation that centers on the role of political culture, which draws on Weiner's (1991) thesis regarding the beliefs of political and bureaucratic elites. After pointing to the limitations of that approach, I explore an alternative explanation that repeatedly came up over the course of fieldwork: the role of political leadership. The political economy of development pays scant attention to the role of political leaders. Serious methodological challenges of identifying the causal impact of leadership may be among the reasons. In this section I explore some (tentative) ideas on the possibility that political leadership may have shaped the bureaucratic norms documented in this dissertation.

6.3.1. Political Culture

In his influential study on child labor in India, Myron Weiner (1991) argued that the failure to institute universal primary education in India was due not to material conditions such as low per capita income or public resource constraints. Rather, it reflected what he called the "attitudes of officialdom"—bureaucrats, religious leaders, school teachers, and the Indian middle class—condoning child labor and social inequality more broadly. These prevailing attitudes were anchored in the caste system, a set of "deeply held beliefs that there is a division between people who work with their minds and rule and people who work with their hands are ruled, and that education should reinforce rather than break down this division" (Weiner 1991:5-6). The failure of public agencies to implement universal primary education could be explained by a political culture that justified inaction, what Weiner referred to as the "politics of doing nothing." (1991:195).

²⁸⁰ Recall the results presented in Chapter 2 from the latest PISA evaluation on student learning outcomes in 74 countries and subnational units. The two Indian states included in the study, Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, ranked dead last or very close to last for reading, mathematics and science. Only the country of Kyrgyzstan appears to do worse.

²⁸¹ In his comprehensive study of primary education across the world, Prichett finds that learning outcomes tend to develop non-linearly.

The virtues of Weiner's analysis aside, the idea that political culture is the cause behind bureaucratic norms is difficult to establish. Although Weiner himself did not seek to explain subnational variation in the delivery of primary education, or changes over time, treating political culture as a unified system of beliefs makes it hard to test the causal claim in his theory. Based on my own fieldwork, the evidence gleaned from interviews with public officials and civic actors across the three states offered nothing like a coherent, uniform set of beliefs. The attitudes expressed over the education of children belonging to lower caste groups varied remarkably across respondents within each state, and sometimes even varied within the same interview. Senior officials interviewed in Himachal Pradesh were no less critical of India's universal primary education program than their counterparts in other states.²⁸²

By the same token, in Uttar Pradesh I found many cases in which school teachers and local officials went beyond the call of duty notwithstanding the lack of bureaucratic support for their work. Yet their efforts were systematically undervalued or reproached. Second, the mixed outcomes observed across Indian states make it further difficult to test the political culture thesis. The rapid growth of school infrastructure and student enrollments across Uttar Pradesh, for example, would be hard to explain by an absence of will in the education bureaucracy.²⁸³ None of this is to deny the possibility that relatively coherent belief systems may exist and vary systematically across states. And it may well be the case that Weiner's thesis as applied to India overall remains correct. It is only to point out how difficult it is to establish this version of the political culture thesis empirically.

6.3.2. *Exploring the Role of Political Leadership*

The above discussion saw the limits to a plausible theory based on political culture. Yet the question of origins—where do bureaucratic norms come from?—continues to vex this dissertation. In this section I explore a potential explanation centered on political leadership, which emerged from field research. Based on oral histories collected from several retired senior bureaucrats in Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, preliminary evidence suggests that political leaders in these two held distinct visions, which may have helped guide and motivate senior bureaucrats. The interactions between political leaders and bureaucrats was most critical around the time of state formation, a period when norms within the state—the unwritten rules of the game—were yet to be established. Around that time, senior officials within the bureaucracy turned to political leaders for a vision of state politics as well as how to carry out that vision within the bureaucracy. These political-bureaucrat interactions, in turn, may have helped set in motion distinct normative paths for public agencies across these two states. These ideas, though speculative at this stage, are based on interviews with retired officials, media reports and other documentary sources. They offer a plausible direction for future research on the origins of bureaucratic norms.

²⁸² Several officials I interviewed believed that certain features of India's primary education program, including the curriculum, was out of touch with the needs and realities facing rural children.

²⁸³ Take further the state of Tamil Nadu, which Weiner cites as a case of weak political will. The prevalence of child labor in some sectors and regions across the state notwithstanding, Tamil Nadu is also recognized for having conceptualized and implemented the most successful Midday Meal Program in India (Srinivasan 2010). It is difficult to attribute these varied outcomes to a unified system of beliefs regarding caste and education.

The first Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, Dr. Yashwant Singh Parmar is widely credited for having led the movement for a separate state. Before Himachal Pradesh was granted statehood by India's central government in 1971, there were serious concerns about its financial sustainability. Due to the geographic and climatic constraints of the Himalayan region, large-scale industrial development was not feasible. In making the case to New Delhi for creating the new hill state, Dr. Parmar's arguments focused on the challenges and opportunities for economic development within the hills.²⁸⁴ His vision was to set in motion a self-sustaining hill economy, which could serve as a model for development in the broader Himalayan region. Yet Dr. Parmar's vision went beyond the financial viability of Himachal Pradesh, and subsequent policies for health and education would prove costly to the national exchequer in New Delhi. Dr. Parmar's vision was for an inclusive form of economic development, which drew on the participation of common Himachalis.

Dr. Parmar's concern for everyday hill residents is widely appreciated in Himachal Pradesh. While one would expect leaders from the Congress Party to credit Dr. Parmar, leaders from the opposition party, the BJP, have given due recognition to his visionary leadership. During the recent celebration of Dr. Parmar's 106th birthday, held at the legislative assembly headquarters of District Shimla, the leader of the BJP and current Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, Prem Kumar Dhumal noted: "He [Dr. Parmar] was of the ideology that we should render concerted efforts for the development of the state and understand the social system, politics and literature and agony of the weaker section of the society."²⁸⁵

Hailing from a remote village located in District Sirmaur, Dr. Parmar was intimately aware of the difficulties of delivering public goods and services with the hill region. He was also known to go on extended treks through hills, visiting some of the most isolated regions to understand what villagers needed for development. My interviews with retired bureaucrats reveal that he was eager to spread that awareness among senior officials in the bureaucracy. According to senior officers from the HP state civil service as well as members of the IAS who spent their careers administering the newly formed state, Dr. Parmar frequently interacted with them and was keen to share his vision. Take for example the words of S.K. Alok, a retired IAS officer and former Secretary of Education:

*When Dr. Parmar was Chief Minister, many times he would undertake a tour on foot. He would come visit my district once in a while, and we would walk for 3-4 days in villages. This gave me as DM [District Magistrate] the opportunity to interact with him on his view and vision ... 'Welfare' is not the word he liked to use. These people have to be 'empowered' to take their own decisions, he would say. They will send their children to school if you empower them.*²⁸⁶

The ease of access that bureaucrats had to senior leadership itself is an interesting observation. Bureaucrats placed at similar positions in Uttar Pradesh expressed great difficulty meeting senior political leaders, let alone spending days touring with them.

A closer examination of interactions like these between political leaders and senior bureaucrats in Himachal Pradesh may also help us understand better why the *content* of deliberation has been developmental in Himachal Pradesh. In Uttar Pradesh, meanwhile, political leaders did not express a vision for development within the state. Rather, their political aspirations were tied to

²⁸⁴ Among the extensive writings of Dr. Parmar see especially: Parmar, Y.S. (1965) *Himachal Pradesh: The Case for Statehood*, Directorate of Public Relations, Shimla.

²⁸⁵ "HP progressed due to visionary policies of Dr. Parmar: Dhumal," *Daily Post*, August 5, 2012. Available at: <http://www.dailypostindia.com/news/28752-hp-progressed-due-to-visionary-policies-of-dr-parmar-dhumal.html>.

²⁸⁶ Interview with S.K. Alok, retired IAS Officer and former Secretary of Education, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh.

national stage. Govind Ballabh Pant, a prominent nationalist and statesman within was first elected Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh under British rule, and again later once the India gained independence. Yet his leadership within UP was short-lived. Pant's ascent within the Congress Party brought him to New Delhi, where he became Home Minister in the cabinet of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The pattern obtained among subsequent leaders within UP, including Congress Party stalwart Narayan Datt Tiwari, who served three times as Chief Minister of UP. In between his stints as Chief Minister, he was appointed to India's Planning Commission, served on the upper house of Parliament, the Rajya Sabha, and took on various Cabinet positions.

The career aspirations of political leadership within UP were tied to national politics, to the neglect of development within UP itself. The same goes for the hill region of Uttarakhand, even before it split off from UP. As a high literacy region with both political and administrative significance, Uttarakhand produced many early Congress Party leaders and UP's early Chief Ministers. Interestingly, both Pant and Tiwari actually hailed from the hill district of Almora, which became part of Uttarakhand after the state split. More recently, Tiwari was elected Chief Minister of Uttarakhand after the split, a position he later gave up after Congress Party leadership appointed him governor of Andhra Pradesh. Within Uttarakhand, Pant and Tiwari were both revered but also seen as absentee leaders who were more committed to politics in Lucknow than development in the hill region. Meanwhile in Lucknow, they were seen to have greater commitment to the national political stage. So involved was N.D. Tiwari in national politics that he earned himself the nickname "*Nai Dilli Tiwari*" (New Delhi Tiwari), as he was seen to spend more time in the nation's capital during his terms as Chief Minister than in Lucknow.²⁸⁷

There are several reasons why political leaders in Himachal Pradesh may have a vision for developing the state while those in UP did not. As India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh has long been the kingmaker of India's national politics. Eight out of fourteen prime ministers hailed from UP, and many more have been in the national cabinet. The state also had significance for the Congress Party, whose top leaders like Sonia Gandhi continue to run from constituencies in UP. Yet the pursuit of power at the national level is not unique to Congress Party leadership in UP. The more recent Chief Ministers of UP, who belong to regional parties targeting lower caste voters, have expressed a similar interest in national politics. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) head and recent Chief Minister, Mayawati, has been particularly vocal about her interest in becoming Prime Minister of India. In one of many motivational speeches in advance of the upcoming national election, Mayawati stood on a stage that made as a replica of Delhi's *Lal Qila* (Red Fort), and appealed to her party workers: "*You must ensure a big victory for BSP in the next general elections so that I can deliver the Independence Day speech as Prime Minister from the Red Fort.*"²⁸⁸

The impact of these political aspirations on the bureaucracy demands further examination. Interviews conducted with members of the IAS revealed that senior bureaucrats from UP often aspire to positions in New Delhi's central administration. To the extent that following official rules is rewarded by political and administrative leadership in New Delhi, then senior bureaucrats in UP may even face incentives to promote legalism further down the hierarchy. While these ideas are only speculative, the political vision and aspirations of leaders may be one mechanism that helps account

²⁸⁷ Multiple interviews with academics, senior bureaucrats and retired officials in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

²⁸⁸ "Mayawati loud and clear on her prime ministerial ambitions," *Times of India*, February 18, 2013. Available at: http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-02-18/india/37159493_1_bsp-workers-prime-ministerial-ambitions-bahujan-samaj-party-workers.

for the origins and maintenance of bureaucratic norms. To be sure, if it can be sustained, even that line of argument does not offer complete solace, for the question of where political leaders and their visions originate from presents its own difficulties.

6.4. Beyond the Cases

Having discussed the main findings, contributions and limitations of this dissertation, I now consider how the theoretical insights gleaned from this dissertation might speak to problems of implementation in other sectors and country contexts. The conceptualization of deliberative norms has a close affinity with a broader set of mechanisms and processes that fall under the rubric of participatory governance. Contemporary political philosophers have theorized the role of deliberation in shaping the interests and expectations of citizens, as well as supporting the legitimacy of public institutions (Cohen 1989; Cohen 1997; Habermas 1998). Social scientists have applied these ideas across a range of policy areas, from public service delivery to regulation, analyzing whether and how deliberative mechanisms can foster citizen participation and improve the quality of implementation (Sabel 1994; Ostrom 1996; Fung and Wright 2003).

6.4.1. Beyond Primary Education: India's Panchayati Raj Institutions

Within India, perhaps the most widely studied domain of deliberation is the Panchayati Raj system of elected village government. Along with decentralized government, the India's panchayats aim to equalize political power through quotas reserving village council head seats for women and lower caste groups. A large body of research has analyzed the effect of the panchayat system across a wide range of governance outcomes (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004; Besley, Pande et al. 2005; Heller, Harilal et al. 2007). Others have looked beyond the material outcomes associated panchayat to examine its role in fostering participation and practices of citizenship more broadly. Most often, the panchayat is presented as a participatory, democratic alternative to the rigid, top-down, bureaucratic model of state planning in India (Isaac and Heller 2003). The gram sabha, routine public meetings, of the panchayat is portrayed as a site of deliberation, a space for the poor and otherwise marginalized to engage publicly and make claims, not least of all, for dignity (Rao and Sanyal 2010).

Although valuable in their own right, these studies have largely overlooked the role of the bureaucracy in implementing the panchayati raj system. As some have argued, the devolution of resources and formal authority to local village governments does not by itself yield greater responsiveness within the state (Bardhan and Mookherjee 2006). Formal elections and accountability structures do not always carry over into substantive forms of citizen participation, what Heller (2000) refers to as the varying "degrees of democracy" across Indian states. Yet the question of how deep and uneven India's democracy is may itself turn on the quality of bureaucracy.

In the context of Hindi belt states like Uttar Pradesh, even the implementation of village elections has been deeply problematic, leading to calls for greater administrative oversight (Dutta 2012). In the case of Kerala, which has been widely acclaimed for the depth of its democratic decentralization, panchayat reforms was underwritten by civic agencies like the Kerala Sastra Sahitya

Parishad (KSSP) that helped organize citizens and provided local, field-based knowledge with public agencies (Isaac and Heller 2003). Yet the ability for the KSSP to influence the quality of decentralization was itself contingent broadly inclusive norms within the state encouraging civic input, norms, which in Kerala's case, had evolved over time through bottom-up class mobilization (Heller 1999).

The comparative analysis of bureaucratic norms across Indian states can shed light on the mechanisms through which democratic decentralization takes place. Although panchayats in Himachal Pradesh are not as developed as those in Kerala, they are evolving and the system has gained recognition for being one of the best-functioning in north India. Like the bureaucracy in HP, that state in Kerala faces the same formal design, organizational structures and administrative capacity constraints. While HP has not experienced anything like Kerala's social movements, the presence of active and inclusive civic agencies like KSSP are not unique to Kerala. The Himachal Pradesh branch of the same civic organization, HGVS, which I examined closely in the field, also launched a campaign to strengthen the panchayati raj system. HGVS in fact drew inspiration and practical lessons from KSSP. Yet the ability for civic agencies like HGVS to participate in the process of democratic decentralization was driven by the state. With financial and organizational support from the Department of Rural Development, which oversees panchayats in Himachal Pradesh, HGVS invited officials from KSSP to run training sessions on the panchayati raj system for its own field staff.²⁸⁹

Public agencies in HP have also taken concrete steps to strengthen the participation of citizens and community groups, particularly women. Meetings between women's associations and line departments, along with training and capacity building exercise, have helped women assume leadership roles within the panchayat system. These interactions at the local-level have also provided learning opportunities for the state, allowing public officials to witness first-hand the possibilities and challenges for female leadership in the panchayat system. To be sure, public officials in Himachal Pradesh are by no means satisfied with administrative efforts thus far in developing the panchayat system.²⁹⁰ Yet the state has gone much further than its neighbors in the Hindi belt, and in some ways, it is has been more progressive than most other states in India. Himachal Pradesh took the lead, for example, in expanding the reservation for female leaders in the panchayat system. While the Indian constitution requires that one third of village council head seat should be reserved for women, Himachal Pradesh went beyond the law and extended the quota to fifty percent, allowing half of panchayats to be led by women.

To the extent that public agencies can promote citizen participation and learning among civic agencies involved in panchayat reforms, then bureaucratic norms may influence the very quality of India's democracy. That observation also carries important methodological implications for the study of local democracy in India. As mentioned above, much existing scholarship has tried to identify the effect of local village government, and policy reforms such as the reservation of leadership positions within the panchayat for women and Dalits, on public goods provision and other implementation outcomes. However, unless and until we identify the norms that shape how

²⁸⁹ I had the opportunity to attend some of these training sessions run by the KSSP for HGVS field staff in District Shimla. On some occasions, officials from different line departments were present as well, blurring the boundaries between the learning process for civic agencies and the state itself.

²⁹⁰ Both senior officials and local bureaucrats I interviews across line departments were extremely critical of the continued centralization of authority within the bureaucracy. Yet the level of criticism within the state may reflect expectations that are driven by norms encouraging citizen participation in governance.

public agencies relate to citizens, then we may be missing out on the mechanisms that underwrite citizen access to the state. As Kruks-Wisner (2012) has shown in the case of rural Rajasthan, citizens make claims on the state through a diverse mix of formal and informal mechanisms and relationships. And yet, the set of feasible (and preferable) claim-making strategies may itself be contingent on the norms that guide public agencies and structure their relations to citizens. Bureaucratic norms that encourage public officials to work with women's groups in policy implementation may, in turn, make the individual claim-making strategies of rural women very different in Himachal Pradesh vis-à-vis Rajasthan.²⁹¹

Finally, these findings also suggest a degree of caution in drawing inferences regarding the impact of governance reforms over the delivery of public goods and services in India. While the formal features of panchayat reforms are more or less consistent within and across Indian states, the informal features of governance, how the panchayat is experienced on the ground, who actually participates in it, how citizens' capacities are (not) developed, even whether and how elections are held, are likely to vary, in part due to the uneven quality of public agencies in charge of implementation. Meanwhile, prevailing methods for analyzing the effect of panchayat reforms on public goods outcomes tend to presume consistent implementation.²⁹² Without more fine-grained evidence of how public agencies relate to citizens on an everyday basis, our understanding of the impact of India's democratic decentralization must remain incomplete.

6.4.2. Beyond India: Policy Implementation in Comparative Perspective

This dissertation has focused on the implementation of the right to education in India. This leads one to ask whether the theoretical mechanisms lend themselves to other sets of rights, policies and country contexts. How does the Indian case fit within a broader, comparative perspective of rights enforcement and service delivery? Grounded as they are in the empirical realities of educational service delivery in India, the causal driver of bureaucratic norms and the two ideal types theorized here—deliberative and legalistic—carry forward to other contexts as well, perhaps even to a fault.²⁹³ The concept of deliberative norms in the education bureaucracy draws important parallels to Archon Fung's (2001; 2006) study of governance reform in the Chicago Public School system. His findings reveal that the institutional design of school reforms in Chicago, which decentralized authority and drew parental input through locally elected school councils, was necessary but insufficient for sustaining substantive results. Active support from centralized agencies, in the form of training, local capacity-building and the publicization of achievements, helped to sustain participation among front line workers and parents.

²⁹¹ Indeed, Kruks-Wisner explicitly controls for variation in the quality of bureaucracy across states, allowing her to identify the mechanisms by which individuals access the state within the context of rural Rajasthan. The comparative analysis of bureaucratic norms across Indian states may offer a useful complement to her individual-level analysis.

²⁹² This is particularly so for experimental techniques, whose (laudably) exacting standards of causal inference rest on assumptions of uniform, if not perfect, implementation of panchayat reforms.

²⁹³ A vigorous debate inspired by South Asianists, postcolonial scholars in particular, has ensued over the years regarding the applicability of Enlightenment concepts such as democracy, deliberation and civil society to postcolonial societies like India. See, for example: Chatterjee (2006) and Kaviraj (2002). Most recently, Chibber (2013) has rekindled this debate in his critique of postcolonial theory and defense of employing Marxist concepts of capital, class and labor for the study of India's political economy.

The theoretical construct of bureaucratic norms allows one to take these insights a step further. It provides a framework for analyzing certain sociopolitical features of the state that enable public agencies, which are often centralized and hierarchical, to promote local innovations and apply lessons and best-practices systematically across the organization. The framework also points to some systematic constraints that bureaucratic organizations may face. As the findings from UP's education bureaucracy showed, legalistic norms prevented local agencies from learning about, let alone adopting, the innovations in the Mahila Samkhya KGBV school program. To the extent that similar mechanisms constrain bureaucrats in school systems outside of India. As Fung (2001) observed once again, centralized bureaucracies that oversaw the Chicago school (and police) system did not effectively harness local innovations to institute broader, system-wide improvements. The framework of bureaucratic norms developed here may offer a theoretical avenue to help explain why that was the case.

A related body of research on co-production, institutional arrangements in which local agencies and citizens manage implementation collectively, brings out the importance of public agencies in fostering citizen participation (Ostrom 1996; Joshi and Moore 2004). Although this work has been framed in terms of social capital, which provides communities with the ability to engage in collective action, a closer examination of the case studies reveals the critical role of bureaucracies in helping to build and sustain local collective action.²⁹⁴ Take for example Elinor Ostrom's (1996) analysis of the failure of co-production in Nigeria's primary education sector. As she observed, it was not the absence of social capital that explained poor implementation outcomes, as the villages had informal associations engaged in collective action around education and other policy domains.²⁹⁵ In a pattern similar to what I observed in villages of Uttarakhand, public agencies in Nigeria discouraged active community associations from participating in the implementation process. Although Ostrom does not use the language of bureaucratic norms, she described the internal functioning of Nigeria's education bureaucracy in legalistic terms. Rules would be applied uniformly without due regard to the varying needs across communities, a style of administration that disempowered not only parents but local officials and school teachers as well.

The theoretical import of bureaucratic norms extends beyond primary education to the enforcement of other rights and policies. Scholarship on regulation analyzes the conditions under which public agencies implement labor and environmental rights. Much like the developmental state literature, this work has often relied on Weberian assumptions regarding the bureaucracy. However, in countries across Latin America, where politicized bureaucracies violate the standard assumptions, a growing body of research has identified alternative mechanisms of implementation.²⁹⁶ Analyzing labor regulation across a number of countries, Piore and Schrank (2007; 2008) document the rise of a "Latin model" of labor enforcement in which labor inspectors adapt regulatory policies on the ground according to the needs of individual enterprises and varying socioeconomic contexts. They connect the model to the broader organizational norms and culture within regulatory agencies, which promote flexibility and instill the value of collaboration in new inspectors.

²⁹⁴ The emphasis on social capital is reasonable in light of the prevailing perspectives on development at the time, which assumed that local communities lacked the ability to organize collectively (Ostrom 1997). It may be fair to say, however, that the tides have now swung in the opposite direction and that our theories of governance may be too demanding of local communities to the neglect of public institutions. On that last point, see Mansuri and Rao (2004).

²⁹⁵ As Ostrom observed, "[v]illages that had demonstrated their capabilities to engage in collective action were discouraged by government officials from active engagement in the education of their children" (1996:1076).

²⁹⁶ See for example the following studies: Piore and Schrank (2008), Pires (2008), Amengual (2011) and Coslovsky (2011).

Similarly, in his study of Brazil's Ministério Público, charged with enforcing labor and environmental regulations, Coslovsky (2011) finds that some prosecutors devise innovative, context-specific strategies for solving problems of non-compliance, what he calls "relational regulation." Yet the formal features of the agency, including the official recruitment and training practices cannot account for this behavior, as it tends to promote rule-following and conformity with standard procedures. Finally, Amengual's (2011) study of labor and environmental regulation in Argentina further demonstrates that regulatory agencies that fail to meet the Weberian criteria of political autonomy can, nevertheless, enforce the law effectively when they possess certain administrative resources and linkages with societal groups. Taken together, studies in both the political economy of public service delivery and regulation point to the significance of bureaucratic norms (and other qualitative features of bureaucracy) that allow for effective policy implementation.

6.4.3. Rethinking State Capacity

The study of bureaucratic norms can also help inform broader debates regarding state capacity. Dominant approaches to analyzing state capacity draw on Weber's classic formulation of bureaucracy, highlighting the formal systems and procedures that allow for bureaucratic autonomy (Migdal 1988; Evans 1995; Chibber 2003; Kohli 2004). Even as they point to the problems with bureaucratic autonomy, limitations of formal authority, and the need for societal embeddedness, the Weberian conception continues to loom large in our understanding of state capacity. To be sure, the Weberian model may well be useful for explaining some portion of the disparity in bureaucratic effectiveness across countries (Rauch and Evans 2000). However, can any and all departures from that model be read as a sign of weak state capacity? The findings from this dissertation suggest otherwise. Notwithstanding the same formal administrative features of the Indian state, one that many characterize as a fair approximation of the "rational-legal" ideal that Weber had in mind, the quality of India's public agencies varies significantly.²⁹⁷

In shifting our analytical gaze to the informal norms that guide bureaucrats and structure their relations with citizens, this dissertation raises some important questions for the literature on state capacity and development. To begin with, is the Weberian conception of the state the correct ideal? While the Weberian state model has long been thought to provide the foundations for modern economic and political development, scholars increasingly question it on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Migdal (2001) argues that the basic assumptions of the Weberian model so rarely obtain that even Weber himself would not have accepted it as a norm for countries to consciously adopt. Others have interrogated whether the developmental achievements across countries, particularly in the OECD, can be attributed to Weberian features of the state (Sabel and Zeitlin 2008; Pritchett, Woolcock et al. 2010). Within the domain of education, a great variety of organizational forms exist among high performing countries, and some of the very best performers appear to have more deliberative, flexible forms of organization.²⁹⁸ While that observation has led scholars to advocate the adoption of these alternative organizational forms, it is unclear whether

²⁹⁷ Robert Wade's fascinating study of corruption in India's irrigation sector offers a point of departure from the Weberian ideal, yet he too models India's bureaucracy as one in which "most of the modern features of bureaucratic structure apply" (1985:468).

²⁹⁸ For example, see Sabel et al's (2010) discussion of the organizational features of Finland's education system.

these forms are always appropriate either. It may just be the nature and complexity of tasks associated with delivering educational services that gives the deliberative model an advantage, at least in some instances.

One may still contend that the Weberian ideal captures a critical feature of modern governance, namely, the importance of rational-legal authority. Even if deliberative, flexible forms of bureaucracy were found to generate better implementation outcomes, their full functioning and legitimacy would depend on bureaucracies enjoying autonomy from particularistic interference and corruption. Informal bureaucratic norms, while interesting to observe, could not form the foundation of a theory of state capacity. The concern for rational-legal authority is exacerbated by the realities facing the state in India, including the politicization of traditional identities, such as caste in Uttar Pradesh. According to the dominant discourse, caste politics necessarily undermines state capacity, for it entrenches particularism and undermines any notion of the collective good. As we saw in the case of UP's education bureaucracy, even a legalistic state cannot not overcome the pull of particularism, especially in such a deeply divided and hierarchical society. Under such conditions, the law itself may serve as a mechanism for privileged sections of society to maintain their dominance over the process of implementation.

There is no denying that caste politics places significant strain on bureaucratic efforts to apply rules consistently. However, the issue is whether we should treat this as an aberration en route to modernity, or else a normal feature of governance, especially under conditions of rapid political and economic development. I would argue the latter. In fact, one need not look as far as rural Uttar Pradesh to find difficulties with rational-legal authority as the basis for state capacity. In her study of peasant politics in France, a state as modern and centralized as one might hope to find, Suzanne Berger (1972) observed that peasants did not enter politics according to the smooth teleology of modern development. Rather, traditional peasant organizations adopted distinct strategies for organizing the interests of their constituents, and in so doing, inserted them unevenly into the French political system. Some organizations fiercely guarded peasants from party politics, keeping them outside the remit of the French state. Others mobilized peasants politically to gain control of Paris for their particular ends. The notion that informality and particularistic identities are the remnants of tradition, while the modern state entails a kind of programmatic politics, is difficult to sustain.

The upshot for our understanding of state capacity in developing democracies is twofold. First, informality and particularism should not be read as signs of state failure. Rather, they can form (albeit imperfect) levers of authority, especially when the rational-legal bases of authority are seen to be weak. Second, the study of bureaucratic norms offers a framework for analyzing variation in the modes of governance across the wide range of states that face challenges to rational-legal authority. And it does so with an eye towards developing more informative analytical categories that can help us better understand and classify those states. With regards to future research, while much existing scholarship continues to emphasize the formal design of institutions, we also know that public institutions are subject to informal, unwritten rules that shape how they function and relate to citizens on the ground. These observations compel us as researchers to go beyond the *de jure* rules of the game and consider how their *de facto* interpretation and enactment by public officials and citizens influences the quality of governance.

6.5. Concluding Implications

How might the findings of this study help inform policy initiatives for improving the delivery of public services and strengthening public institutions? As an initial step, the modification of formal administrative and accountability structures within the state should not occupy the sole attention of educational reform efforts. As recent waves of democratic and decentralized planning have shown, even the most well-intentioned institutional reform efforts can fail, sometimes with tragic consequences. At least as much, if not more, attention and resources ought to be devoted to uncovering the norms and practices through which governance is enacted on the ground. In developing its universal primary education policy, India followed an approach taken by many governments, adopting an organization blueprint without fully assessing its environmental fit. To that end, identifying ways to promote experimentation and learning prior to large-scale adoption may bear fruit.

What about the case of public agencies that appear locked in a set of norms that do not accord with societal needs? Do the findings from India's education system inspire any ideas for change? One possibility is to attempt change incrementally, say for instance by providing external support to actors who are willing to attempt innovations, even when the larger bureaucracy may not encourage their efforts. The problem arises then, of course, as to how one might scale up such innovations, which points perhaps to the limits of incremental change theories. However, to the extent that innovators can be granted autonomy to pursue alternative models within an organization, as with the Mahila Samakhya KGBV program in Uttar Pradesh, then there may be fruitful opportunities for change that have yet to be realized, even in the least likely places.

Appendix. Methodological Note: The Study of Bureaucratic Norms

Bureaucratic norms are unwritten yet widely shared understandings within public agencies that instruct officials on how to behave. They provide the standards and guidelines by which officials learn to enact their roles and responsibilities, and evaluate the actions of their colleagues. In this Appendix section, I discuss in more detail how exactly one can go about establishing the presence of a bureaucratic norm. Earlier in the chapter I discussed the methodology of this study. Fieldwork within the bureaucracy consisted of in-depth interviews with state planners, senior and local officials and school teachers. Interview evidence was supplemented by participant observation of meetings and informal interactions, both within the concerned agencies, and between public officials and citizens.

For these methods to yield reliable data on bureaucratic norms and their connection to policy implementation, the researcher must first achieve a firm grasp, a “thick description,” of the organization (and sociopolitical context) in question and develop a native understanding of how it functions (Geertz 1973). That requires one to invest significant time both “inside” and “outside” the agency, both to establish a rapport with officials and triangulate observations across multiple individuals and sources of evidence (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Gellner and Hirsch 2001).²⁹⁹ The study of bureaucratic norms thus entails iterative adjustments throughout the data collection process. It is in the course of honing a sensitivity to the sociopolitical context and organizational environment that one can identify the right questions and appropriate ways of engaging respondents during interviews (Weiner 1964; Rubin and Rubin 1995).

The ethnographic methods described above help generate reliable data on the inner workings of a public agency. Still, to identify bureaucratic norms and connect them to behaviors, we must subject the process of data collection and analysis to discipline (Miles and Huberman 1994). To that end, I develop a decision tree that guides the analysis of bureaucratic norms in my case studies (see Figure 1.4.1).³⁰⁰ We begin with question in STEP 1: *Can bureaucratic behavior be predicted by formal institutions?* According to Brinks (2006), that question allows us to establish quickly whether a study of norms is even necessary. To my mind, that is not quite right. Even if bureaucratic behavior appears consistent with the predictions of formal institutions, that observation in itself does not rule out the operation of norms.

To understand why, one need only consider the earlier distinction made between norms and patterns of behavior. No matter how many times we observe individuals taking their hats off in a church, we cannot claim with certainty that a norm is driving their behavior and not some other factor—the church building could have a particularly hot environment. Similarly, the correlation between formal incentives and an observed behavioral regularity, while certainly helpful evidence, does not by itself amount to a causal explanation. We would need to examine more closely the causal mechanisms by which bureaucrats respond to the incentives in question.

If we have evidence to show that bureaucratic behavior can be predicted by formal incentives, then we can ask the follow-up question in STEP 2: *Do bureaucrats describe their behavior in*

²⁹⁹ It involves the researcher “participating overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 1)

³⁰⁰ Following Brinks (2006) and others who have studied informal institutions,

terms of rules of conduct? This gets at the issue of normativity, whether members of the bureaucracy possess a common understanding of how they ought to behave. Given the inherent difficulties of determining what a common understanding might be empirically, we must turn at this stage to qualitative evidence, including field methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviews. These methods allow for close observation of how public officials behave, the learning process they experience, and how they respond to pressures within and outside the organization. If nothing like a norm is understood by bureaucrats to be at work, then we can safely say that, in all likelihood, such norms either do not exist, or do not influence the behaviors in which are interested. If bureaucrats do describe their behavior in terms of norms, then we are left to probe further how informal norms interact with formal incentives to produce the observed patterns of behavior.

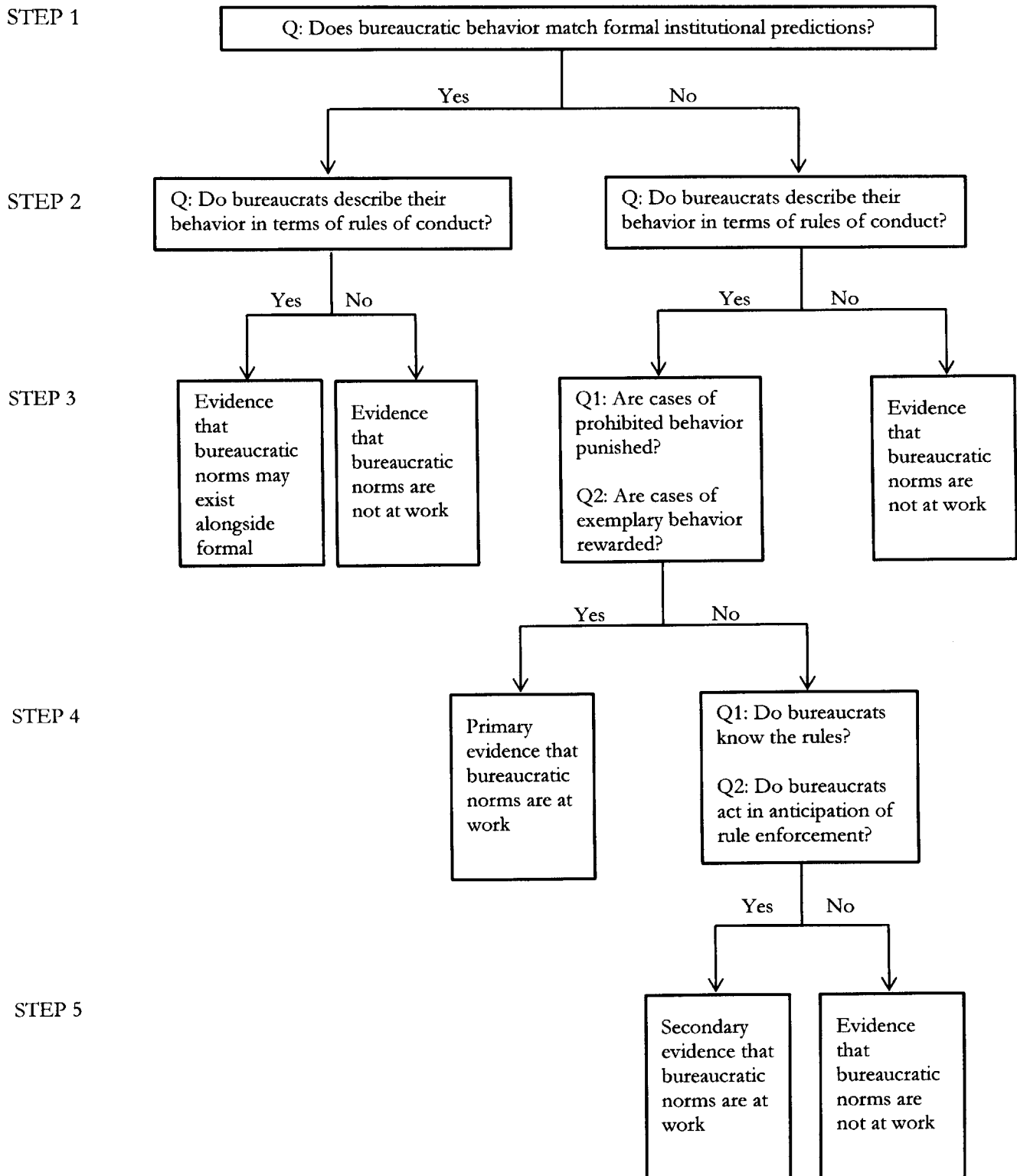
Much more could be said about the situation when empirical evidence points to both formal incentives *and* norms. But I will leave that aside for now, since the problem that interests me here is when formal institutions (which are held constant in this case) *do not* predict well the variation in bureaucratic behaviors that concern us. When the answer to the first question in our decision tree is no, we continue along with the question in STEP 2: *Do bureaucrats describe their behavior in terms of rules of conduct?* We turn here to the qualitative data taken from interviews and participant observation methods within the bureaucracy. If bureaucrats do not communicate any shared understanding of how they ought to behave, then we can say that the presence of norms is indeterminate, or that they do not influence the patterns of behavior that interest us. At this stage we can probe other theoretical mechanisms more closely, such as formal institutional design, or factors outside the bureaucratic agency.

If, on the other hand, bureaucrats do describe their behavior in terms of informal rules of conduct, then we have reason to probe further. STEP 3 aims to probe, with hard evidence, whether bureaucratic norms are actually applied. At this stage we ask: *Do cases of prohibited behavior get punished? Are cases of exemplary behavior rewarded?* Here we want some evidence of social approval or disapproval with respect to bureaucratic behavior that interests us. Take for example behaviors associated with communication across the bureaucratic hierarchy. When lower-level bureaucrats try to convey ground realities to their seniors, are they met with approval and support or disapproval and resistance? Ideally, the analyst could observe directly observe cases of punishment or reward. In the absence of that, however, in-depth interviews provide respondents the opportunity to share such cases. These kinds of primary evidence (of reward and sanction) can give us some confidence that a bureaucratic norm is at work.

What happens, however, in the absence of primary evidence? Here we arrive at a real dilemma, for norms quite often do not carry evidence of sanction or reward. In fact, the most effective norms may be the ones that are least visible to the external observer, since they have been internalized by members of an organization or society. In the absence of primary evidence we move to STEP 4 and ask: *Do the bureaucrats know the rules of conduct? Do they act in anticipation of rule enforcement?* We turn again here to in-depth interviews and participant observation. If bureaucrats do not convey even a mild awareness of informal rules of conduct, then we can safely say that a bureaucratic norm does not exist with regards to the behavior that interests us. However, if bureaucrats do exhibit knowledge of an informal rule at work, then we can probe further into their behavior and examine whether they act in ways that anticipates rule enforcement. For example, in explaining why they are unable to pursue a certain course of action, if bureaucrats point to the likely disapproval of their officemates or superiors, then we have secondary evidence for the existence of a bureaucratic norm. If not, then we have evidence that a norm is not at work.

The decision tree below offers a way to collect and interpret qualitative evidence for establishing the presence of a norm and how it shapes behavior within a bureaucratic organization. It allows one to systematically identify the mechanism through which norms operate. In some cases, informal communication is all that is necessary to enforce a norm. In other cases, formal institutions can play a role. For example, official meetings held by organizational committees can serve as a mechanism to convey social approval and disapproval. Given the multiple means by which bureaucratic norms can be enacted and enforced, primary evidence is always preferred, though ideally one should supplement it with secondary evidence whenever possible.

Figure 1.4.1 Decision Tree for Identifying Bureaucratic Norms



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